

VIEWS OF ATTICA

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VIEWS OF ATTICA AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

by

REX WARNER



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*This book is dedicated in love and
gratitude to my friends in Athens*

ATTICA and its SURROUNDINGS



Introductory

To DESCRIBE Greece is impossible. Moreover I have not seen it. I have seen only Athens, and its surrounding countryside, Salonica, parts of the Peloponnese and central Greece, a few islands. I know, perhaps enough to know that I am ignorant ; and yet the little that I have seen, the little that I know are fixed indelibly in mind and memory—fixed as are no other sights and as is little other knowledge.

To love a country does not necessarily mean to understand it ; yet understanding is impossible without love, and, in so far as love can equip one for understanding, I am not conscious of any deficiency. Nor is love too strong a word to use for a feeling which, though it is directed to scenes, to landscapes, to history and to groups of people, is both violent and tender, full of expectation which is never disappointed, full of reverence, excitement and joy. There is even, I am aware, a kind of exclusiveness or monogamy in the emotion, something rather deplorable from the point of view of those who would have us love man or love Europe in the abstract, impartially and equally. This I cannot do. When I see an olive or a pine tree in Italy, I am, I hope, aware of its beauty ; but it is difficult for me not to think of the sturdier trunks, the brighter colours, the greater individual variety of such trees in Greece. Fortunately the olive does not grow in England, and the pines are wholly different, so that in my own country I am not driven to make

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comparisons. Unfortunately, perhaps, with regard to most other Mediterranean lands I find myself in the mood of Sir Henry Wotton who wrote :

You meaner beauties of the night,
That poorly satisfy your eyes
More by your number than your light,
You common people of the skies ;
What are you when the moon shall rise ?

Such arrogance in affection may be rationally indefensible, but is at least natural.

In writing of Greece I can claim neither the knowledge of a Baedeker nor the precision of a statistician. Yet the enthusiasm of a lover is not always unreliable. With regard to a person whom one loves, one knows that a history of her past life or a catalogue of her physical measurements is not the surest way to understanding, and that, while intense affection may sometimes blind us, as often as not it may reveal aspects of reality that are beyond the reach of measurement or of exact narration. I believe that the same thing is true of countries, though, both with countries and with individuals, it is exceedingly difficult to delineate or to describe the objects of one's passion to other people. It is often the case that in recalling a gesture, a chance phrase or what might seem an irrelevant occasion one is able to give a more accurate impression, both of one's own feelings and of the reality of their object, than could be given by a detailed and consecutive description. So, in writing of Greece, I shall attempt the objectivity of the lover rather than that of the scientist, and shall describe isolated scenes and characters rather than try to paint a broad and comprehensive picture of a country and its people. Ignorance and love dictate the method,

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but it is a method that need not necessarily be valueless, unless one's ignorance is total or one's love misdirected.

Where should I begin? With what significant, powerful or appealing gesture of a people or a land? With music and dancing, with seas and mountains, with some great name, Marathon, Salamis or the great walls of the citadel of Salonica, places of suffering and of glory, monuments to the spirit that throughout the centuries and against appalling odds has preserved the integrity of its civilization? "A small place, but a good place for breeding men" was how Odysseus described his own island of Ithaca. Now in the clash of vast opposing systems and enormous populations, one may perhaps think in the same terms of Greece. Yet is it possible to use the adjective "small" of a country which colonized the shores of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, which spread its civilization from Macedonia to the Indus, whose cities include Athens, Constantinople and Alexandria? Of a country which, in our own times, against vastly superior organizations of men and metal, has shown that tremendous enterprise, that intelligent recklessness which Pericles had in mind when he said of the Athenians: "This is another point where we differ from others: we are ready to dare everything, and at the same time we look carefully into the risks which we are taking."

Proud words; but what words can be too proud for a people with such a history in the past and in the present?

Certainly the background is one of splendour, of suffering and of achievement. The brilliance and gaiety of Greece and the Greeks are genuine enough; but beneath them there is a fund of experience and of wisdom. Symbols are plentiful, both in ancient and modern times. Possibly the best one still

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is the character of Odysseus, that shrewd and brilliant man, capable of the deepest feeling, practical, consumed with curiosity, heroic, with the epithets of "god-like" and "much-enduring", and who, at moments of supreme peril, will say to himself, "My heart, you must endure. Worse things than this you have endured before now." Or there is still Orestes, of whom the modern poet Seferis writes :

Into the track, into the track again, into the track
How many laps, how many rounds of blood, how many dark
Tiers : the people watching me
Who were watching when from the chariot
Splendid, I raised my hand, and they applauded.

The foam of the horses spatters me, when will the horses
weary ?

The axle grinds, the axle glows, when will the axle catch
fire ?

When will the reins snap, when will the hooves tread full on
the ground

On the soft grass, among the poppies where
In Spring you picked a daisy.

They were beautiful, your eyes, but you did not know
where to look

Nor did I, I without a country

Who am struggling here, so many laps

And my knees fail me above the axle

Above the wheel above the cruel course

The knees fail easily when the gods wish it,

None can escape, strength is in vain, you cannot

Escape from the sea which cradled you and which you seek

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In this hour of struggle among the panting of the horses,
With the reeds singing in autumn in the Lydian mode,
The sea which you cannot recover although you run
Although you circle in front of the dark bored Eumenides
Unforgiven.

Exile, loss, danger and continual activity are and have been for three thousand years the background to Greek singing and dancing and poetry and delight. It is this experience of the people just as much as the bright suffusing sun or the clear lines of visible objects that makes what is real seem to have in Greece an even greater reality and that exposes rapidly and decisively what is false, loose or sentimental. In Greece there seems to be more laughter and more tears than in most places ; but what is really unique is that both the laughter and the tears are genuine.

There is a verse of a Cretan song which declares that if anywhere you scratch the soil of the island with a needle you will discover the bones of great warriors. And of Greece in general it is true that the slightest penetration of the superficial, even the slightest alteration of a conventional focus will reveal an enormous and vehement tradition. For some of this tradition the symbols of Odysseus or of Orestes, in ancient or modern guise, may be adequate. But there are also symbols from Byzantium, from Alexandria, from Antioch, symbols from Thrace and from Eleusis. And these are symbols to describe the living, not the dead. And still the symbols are inadequate for the variety of the scene.

Indeed it is no wonder that the Greeks discussed so emphatically the concepts of The One and of The Many, for surely nowhere else has there existed so powerful an underlying unity

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together with so various a plurality. Each island, each town, each man, each pine tree has its own uniqueness, yet each of them is Greek and could be nothing else.

In speaking of visible objects one will note a line and a colour that are unique and infinitely various.¹ In speaking of the people one will be led to reflect on a deep wisdom that underlies all kinds of extravagances. In the Europe of the west, when some appalling catastrophe of power politics is not taking place, life is usually regulated with an apparent efficiency and in a sort of comfort. Yet, to my mind, we have little reason to congratulate ourselves on these inter-belligerent and finally unsatisfactory achievements. Albert Camus well writes : “ Nous avons exilé la beauté, les Grecs ont pris les armes pour elle. Première différence, mais qui vient de loin. La pensée grecque s'est toujours retranchée sur l'idée de limite. Elle n'a rien posée à bout, ni le sacré, ni la raison. Elle a fait la part de tout, équilibrant l'ombre par la lumière. Notre Europe, au contraire, lancée à la conquête de la totalité, est fille de la démesure. Elle nie la beauté, comme elle nie tout ce qu'elle n'exalte pas. Et, quoique diversement, elle n'exalte qu'une seule chose qui est l'empire futur de la raison. Elle recule dans sa folie les limites éternelles, et, à l'instant, d'obscures Erynnies s'abattent sur elle et la déchirent.”

The race whose proverbs were such ones as “ Nothing in excess ” and “ Know thyself ” is a race of strong passions and of vigorous demands, a race knowing excess, knowing intoxication of all kinds. Yet what is still characteristic of the race is a kind of modesty, and, in the midst of so much laughter

¹ They have been beautifully described by a modern Greek, Pericles Iannopoulos, who one day crowned himself with flowers and rode on horseback to drown himself in the sea near Eleusis. They say that the peasants on the island where his body was washed up regarded the corpse as an image of an ancient god.

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and tears, so greatly inflamed political and intellectual passions, a central calm,—not, perhaps, what we would call “sobriety” nor the religious among us “the fear of god”, but rather a recognition of “eternal limits”, a concrete awareness of men and Gods—something very different from any statistical or abstract method of thought.

The word “style” may perhaps be used as an aid to describing the peculiar balance, grandeur, integrity and variety of the Greek scene,—a style that is immediately recognizable, like the style of Mozart, something that cannot possibly be imagined as better or even different from what it is. When one’s eyes have been filled with the shapes, lines and colours of the mountains of Greece, other mountains will seem crudely designed, badly spaced, too big or too small, often monstrous or ridiculous, as though Nature had lost her touch and had ceased to be interested in perfection.

So, certainly, I felt, when last I left Greece and proceeded directly to the Bay of Naples. While crossing the bay to the island of Capri we watched a sunset that covered the whole sky with violent and blazing colour. Red, yellow, blue flamed along the horizon, spread over the waves and climbed to the zenith. In front of us was the precipitous face of Capri and behind us the slow slopes of Vesuvius. Such sunsets, perhaps, can only be seen in volcanic air. It was a unique evening and, in the company of friends, such splendour should have been enjoyed.

Yet I could only think of the three mountains of Athens, each so different from each,—massive Parnes, with its woods, shining Penteli, strong and graceful in its effortless piercing of the air, and the long ridge of Hymettus with its shadowy folds. In my mind’s eye were always these miraculous rocky

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eminences, either bathed in golden air, or darkening and shimmering in the light of the setting sun, the violet crown of Athens. Compared with that Attic light, those noble and individual lines, that purity and beauty, the sky of Italy appeared to me garish, indeed intolerably vulgar, the line of coast and mountain was strangely uninteresting, Capri itself misshapen. The tears came to my eyes not because I lacked friends (they were with me), but because I had become separated from a peculiar brilliance, an inexplicable perfection. To re-create it in words is impossible; to hint at some of its aspects may, perhaps, be attempted.

It is fitting to start with Athens and convenient not to attempt for the moment any panoramic descriptions. Instead I shall imagine a walk from Constitution Square to a wine shop under the Acropolis.

Psaras

CONSTITUTION, or, to give it its right name, Syntagma Square is an open space, covered with asphalt and surrounded on three sides by high buildings, hotels, offices, a few apartment houses and shops. On summer evenings and late into the hot nights much of the space is filled with tables and chairs. Usually a breeze stirs the leaves of the trees at the upper end of the Square, where, beyond the raised roadway, lie the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the Royal Palace, and the Royal Gardens, in fact a public park, which in spring and summer is full of the song of nightingales. But in Syntagma itself the noise of traffic will make the birds inaudible. On the nights that I have in mind the sky will seem pitch-black and beneath the sky hundreds of faces will be illuminated by the artificial light ; slow strollers will go between the lines of tables ; it will be worth looking closely at the faces, whether eager with argument or in repose, to see whether one will meet here some friend who has stopped for a cup of coffee, an ice or merely for a conversation on politics, on literature, on personalities, generalities or scandal.

But, night or day, we are not interested in this Square for the moment. Suppose that it is day, and in bright light one is walking away from the Royal Palace in the direction of the Acropolis. On the right are the large hotels, the Grande Bretagne and the King George V ; at the town end of the square are the beginnings of some of the shopping streets.

Views of Attica

Here one may go directly forward and pass the huge neo-Byzantine Cathedral with, at its side, a tiny and infinitely more beautiful Byzantine Church, called the Little Metropolis. Then one will go to the left, plunging into the narrow streets of the Plaka, the old Athens that Byron knew. Or, at the bottom of the Square one may turn left and then right again. Then too one will find oneself in a maze of winding streets, streets full of small shops and of old houses, something of whose appearance may be perceived in the paintings of Ghika or the drawings of Osbert Lancaster.

All kinds of objects will be on sale. There will be strings of boots, sandals and shoes, strings of sausages and of brightly coloured vegetables. There will be meat roasting on spits, iron-work and jewellery, brilliant blankets and rugs, bottles, and, in carnival time, great masks, false noses and paper streamers. If lucky or accurate, for the place is not easy to find, one will in the end arrive at a dusty and derelict open space, looking like some part of a bombed area that no one has bothered to make tidy. From here we climb uphill toward the sheer walls of the Acropolis, and, on steep steps, come to the place where the roads of Erechtheus and of Erotocritos meet. The names seem to possess a peculiar significance for this area of the old town where the Acropolis looks down on what survived of Athens under the Turks ; for Erechtheus was the legendary king, nurtured by Athene herself and, in some legends, confined by her in a chest from which, having taken on the form of a serpent, he drove mad those curious and disobedient women who opened the chest to discover what was inside. His temple, one of the finest works of Ionic architecture, stands on the Acropolis, guarding the sacred olive tree. Of his descendants Euripides writes :



Psaras

From of old the children of Erechtheus are
Splendid, the sons of blessed gods. They dwell
In Athens' holy and unconquered land
Where sacred wisdom feeds them, and they pass gaily
Always through that most brilliant air, where once,
they say,
That Golden Harmony gave birth to the nine
Pure Muses of Pieria.

And Erotocritos is the name of the Cretan epic love poem of the 16th century, popular and romantic. The ending is happy, but the loves of the Athenian princess Arethusa and of Erotocritos, son of the prime minister of Heracles, King of Athens, do not run smoothly.

At the meeting of the steep rough ascending road, the road of Erechtheus and the road at right angles to it that follows the town slopes of the Acropolis, the road of Erotocritos, stands the wineshop of Psaras, to the right as one goes uphill. The proprietor of this shop, known to many of his customers as "the old man with the whiskers", is of moderate height, red-faced, positive in his views (he will turn even his favourite customers out of his house if he wishes to go to bed early), somewhat stooping in gait, and resolved to speak his own peculiar English to every Englishman who visits him, even to those who speak his own language with the greatest fluency.

His is an inn, or "taverna", where, if one wants to eat, one has to bring one's own food. But the wine he serves, if he serves his best, is excellent. It will be, of course, "retsina"; and, before I describe the scene that I now imagine before my eyes, it will be necessary to write something of this popular and, to my taste, delicious drink.

Views of Attica

Most retsina is light in colour, slightly paler, I should say, than most French white wines. There is also the red resinated wine, or "coccinelli", and of this the best that I have drunk is to be found in the beautiful gardens of a taverna in Liopesi, the birthplace of Demosthenes, below the northern slopes of Hymettus. Here the wine is of a pale ruby colour, light and brilliant, befitting Attica. Elsewhere in Greece, though the wine is good, it seems often to lack that especial Attic glint. The white retsina of Mycenae and Argos looks, though does not taste, a trifle muddy, as though too much of the grey, sticky, putty-like mixture of resin from the pines had imparted colour as well as taste to the juice of the grapes. The red wine of Arachova, the village perched on Parnassus above Delphi, is justly famous ; but it too seems heavier and thicker and somewhat lustreless when compared with the coccinelli of that hospitable garden in Liopesi where, on the way to or from Sunium, one may sit for hours beneath the shade of flowering trees, eating, while one idly sips the wine, pomegranates, pieces of liver, white cheese, radishes and pickled cucumber, attended, as a rule, by the son of the owner of the vineyards, a young man who will conclude most of his sentences with the words "Very nice", who will give his guests at least one flask more of the wine than they really need, and who, before they leave, will present the ladies with lemon flowers and the men with sprigs of verbena and mimosa.

Indeed Attica is the place for retsina, and retsina is the drink for Attica, whether in the city, inland or by the sea. The resin which gives its name and its peculiar taste to the wine seems to me not only a preservative, but to infuse something of the sharpness and brilliance of the bright air around the mountain pine woods. It is not, however, to everyone's stomach. Some

Psaras

will tell you that it is an acquired taste and will describe how they themselves have laboriously acquired it. Others, like myself, will enjoy it from the very first sip. Some unfortunates will never enjoy it at all. Indeed they are to be pitied, and in the country districts will often be handicapped, though in Athens itself and in other parts of Greece too it is quite easy to get unresinated wine, of which, to my mind, the least palatable is that sweet wine of Samos with which Byron urges us to "fill high the bowl".

Now, to return to Psaras and his own white retsina, I imagine a particular morning in early autumn. I am sitting outside the small wineshop and on the small iron table are glasses and a blue tin mug of wine. These blue tin mugs, containing either about half a pint or a pint, seem to be found at nearly all the tavernas of Attica. Glass carafes are futilities, and, just as some beer-drinkers will maintain that their liquor tastes best when drunk out of pewter, so some lovers of retsina will prefer their wine from these blue and often chipped or battered canisters. Whether this is an example of purism or a patriotic gesture, I do not know, but I rather sympathize with the view, and now, as I grasp the mug by its small handle and tip it sideways to the left (it is the height of bad manners to pour out wine backhanded, or with a clock-wise movement of the right wrist) I look down the steep and dusty steps of the road of Erechtheus in the direction of the busy centre of Athens. Here, only a little distance from the trams and taxis and big hotels, there is a wholly different atmosphere, and I know that this fact is characteristic of Greece, where one has only to turn a corner, to wait a moment or to look in a different direction in order to find the whole scene changed.

Here the scene is one totally different from what might be

Views of Attica

imagined of a capital city. The two roads are dusty and unpaved. The houses along the rough streets are small and poor and ancient, though, surprisingly, just in front of me, at the corner of the road of Erechtheus there is a modern white house, small also, but apparently more prosperous than the houses that surround it. In front a green oleander tree droops over the dust of the steps.

I look to the right along the level road of Erotokritos, rough also and just wide enough for a car or cart to use. There is a door and shutter of a peculiar lime green; then a narrow house, painted brown, and beyond that a long yellow house with brown shutters, one of which is open, revealing in the window a bird-cage of brilliant green. Facing these houses, and immediately to my right is a small Byzantine church, and in its narrow precincts washing is hanging up to dry. These churches are often, like this one is, smaller than anything familiar to us in western church architecture. They seem like caskets set down either among houses that are bigger than they, or in great spaces, or against the sides of mountains. Trees shade what, if it was bigger, might be called a square, but which is only a corner—the almost hidden church, the low coloured houses, the wine-shop, and behind all the towering walls of the Acropolis.

I hear the sound of bells, of horse's hooves upon the ground, and the rumbling of a cart. Shutters in the houses opposite me are opened and from one of the doors emerge an old woman, severe in face and well wrapped in black voluminous clothes, and a young girl, raggedly dressed, with an eager and an adult face. The horse and cart, the property of a seller of vegetables, come into sight and stop by the window where the bird-cage hangs.

Psaras

Both horse and cart are profusely decorated. The body of the cart is painted in bright colours, as bright as are the tomatoes and grapes with which it is loaded. The spokes, rims and hubs of the wheels are painted too, in red, blue and yellow ; underneath the cart is slung a brilliantly red bucket. More splendid still is the horse, not in itself, since it appears to be an animal of no great strength or remarkable grace, but in the equipment that has been lavished upon it. Rising between its ears is a shining circle of brass enclosing a brass star and surmounted by a brass crescent. On the forehead, and equally brightly polished, is the shape of a diamond in brass, and below this a band of the same metal. A red tassel hangs from the horse's nose, and round its neck is a necklace of beads from which depends a yellow tassel and a bell. Another bell, surmounted by another tassel, stands upright on the horse's back, attached to the girth. The blue and white Greek flag sticks out, somewhat askew, from the structure that supports the bell.

The young seller of fruit and vegetables holds great scales of brass, like those we see held by symbolical statues of Justice. His teeth gleam as he laughs with the women for whom he is weighing out the grapes and the tomatoes. Now old Psaras himself emerges from his shop. A few steps take him past the church to the cart, from which, after a close survey through his narrowed eyes, he selects a few tomatoes. As he passes the two small tables in front of his door I say to him, "A nice horse, that one." It is his characteristic to contradict almost everything that one says, and so he replies, "No nice horse." He pauses, as though expecting an argument, and then, after a little deliberation, adds, "English Derby is a nice horse."

Then, as though repeating some well-known news, he informs me, "No English Derby now. All gone." Shaking his

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head regretfully he goes through the door. I know that it would be an unkindness to attempt to undermine his belief in the accuracy of his own knowledge ; nor in any case would he believe me. It pleases him, probably, to attribute to Italian or German action the extinction of a famous breed of horses, or a racing event, or both.

The shutters are now closed, the streets quiet and almost empty, as the horse and cart go past the wine shop and round the corner. A little way further up the hill two small and ragged boys are playing in the dust. Their hair is closely cropped ; large black eyes seem to fill their pale faces that light up from moment to moment with quick and various emotions. From some part above them that is hidden by trees and houses comes the sound of singing. The singers are invisible. They are sitting, perhaps, below the walls of Themistocles, looking down over the red-tiled roofs of the Plaka to the trams, the big hotels, the squares and yellow extended suburbs of the city. The words they sing are the words of a popular dance tune.

Through the brisk and brilliant air the hum of the city is just perceptible, together with other isolated sounds, shrill screams of mothers to their children whose names, screeched from the housetops, may be Clytemnestra or Aspasia, syllables which, like the air itself, seem timeless, vivid, ancient in a continual present.

For some reason my mind's eye turns to the banks of the river Wye and to the ruins of Tintern Abbey where once, as a boy, I listened to a philosophic uncle declaiming the famous words of Wordsworth. When he had finished, he paused and regarded me gravely. " Space-Time," he pronounced. " It is all a continuum." Only dimly apprehending his meaning,

Psaras

I gazed with new eyes on the dripping mossy walls and the green grass. Yet still that monkish and ruined past seemed indefinitely remote. Only the water there and the vegetation possessed for me the qualities of a vigorous permanence.

Here, on the lower slopes of the Acropolis, it is different. The ancient, the middle-aged and the new are distinct, yet close together, interpenetrating each other, all exciting and excitable. So I have learnt from my eyes and also from my ears, wandering here and over the Acropolis itself at day or at night. Not that the unity and the extent in time and space of Greece is wholly symbolized by a rock in Athens or by Athens itself. It may equally well be said that Greece is the sea and the islands and the distant coastlines of Anatolia and Egypt. This one will soon discover, if not of one's own accord, then in conversation with Greeks themselves.

And now, still sitting in the sun in front of the blue mug and the shining glass, I think with delight of the conversations I have had at night inside this very wine shop of Psaras. Indoors there is one small room with a stove, and from this room a kind of ladder leads to another room at a higher level, small and dimly lit. There were many evenings spent in this room with friends. We used to bring our own food,—sometimes merely tins of cold “Kalamarakia” or inkfish, swimming in black oil and not very palatable, however much bread one used to soak up the oil; sometimes cheese, olives and sausages; and sometimes a friend’s wife would cook a chicken at home and we would carry it through the streets wrapped in a napkin. Then there would be grapes and slices of apple to soak in the wine.

Here we would talk and laugh till old Psaras grew restive at our prolonged stay. And from these and other conversations I

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began to learn something more of Greece than is, perhaps, readily available in most of our newspapers. There were stories of the disaster in Asia Minor, of the Greeks in Egypt and Palestine, of the German occupation, the famine, the civil war. There were stories of great funerals, of strange love affairs, of voyages, of necrophily, of volcanic waters. With infinite gaiety and with a fantastic variety, there was an intellectual concentration. I remember the great head of the poet Seferis thrust forward from the shadow into the light, and, in his quick intelligent eyes for once a hard look, as in a gentle voice he remarked to an Englishman who had expressed what was intended to be a daring opinion : "But what you have said is without meaning." I can remember discussions and conversations of all kinds, also the invariable and delightful presence of Captain Antoniou, a poet, a traveller and a great authority on natural history, who once remarked when my friend Katsmbolis was playing with a kitten : "See! George seeks to bewilder the cat", and who, after I had had the pleasure of entertaining him on one occasion, thanked me in what he sometimes described as his "rustful" English for "a most agreeable tiffin".

But the scene we are recalling is in the day, not in the night. Now Psaras has come to clear away the blue mug and the glasses. It is time to be going. We have gone nowhere yet.

An Evening's Entertainment

AND IF we were to assume that it was now lunch time, that for the moment one was too hungry to climb the Acropolis, how difficult it would be to choose exactly where to go. Downhill, to left and right, in narrow tortuous streets there are multitudes of tavernas, far too many to be mentioned, yet each in some way distinctive. One will be notorious for the shade of a plane tree, another for a guitarist, an open garden, a tremendous concentration of huge wine-casks or for some other reason. In most of them the floors will be rough, the tables and chairs set close together. In one corner of the room the proprietor will stand behind a slab of marble or a table, and behind that will be the fire for cooking. Before ordering one's meal one will peer into great pots and examine the pork, the small fried inkfish, or the large black inkfish in oil, the clopped kidneys and liver, broad beans cooked in their pods, peas, rice and meat in vine leaves ; or from a refrigerator one may choose one's fish,—red mullet, plaice, or a steak of synagrida. Or there will be chicken, turkey, octopus, and, at some of the tavernas near the sea, the strangest creatures,—sea urchins, sea anemones, and, occasionally, what appear to be clods of earth about the size of a potato, containing in the centre a yellow substance like the over-cooked yolk of an egg.

We could certainly do worse than to turn right along Erotocritos Street and then begin to descend the slopes. It is

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difficult, as always, to find one's way about here, but we are aiming at the street of Bacchus which is not far from the main road that sweeps round the east and south of the Acropolis Hill. In this street there is a taverna with frescoed walls of no great artistic value which I remember from my first days in Athens.

I remember lunching here with friends among whom were a young man and a young woman, both poets and both, I think, influenced by the surrealist school. They were contributors to a modern periodical which was at that time much discussed in Athens. The young man was wearing battle dress ; he was in the army but on the point of being demobilized. Of the girl's appearance I remember chiefly her large and brilliant black eyes, and the variety of ways in which she was able, very decorously, to tie a bright yellow scarf around her head. There were others of us too, Greek and English. •

The party was a gay one. We discussed literature and politics. On the latter subject these two young people had little to say that was at all partisan, and little that was not bitter. The period was not long after the almost total occupation of Athens by ELAS, the left-wing fighting organization of the resistance. It is not my intention to attempt to deal with the complications of Greek politics, but the fact that many thousands of hostages, mostly "unpolitical", had been massacred by ELAS before their retreat is a fact worth bearing in mind, and one which will make some reactions of the Greek people more easy to understand.

Then we talked of the various ways in which healths could be drunk,—by linking arms or by holding the glasses by the outer rims and by, as it were, stroking the surfaces together, producing a noise not unlike the croaking of frogs. We discussed

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the various gestures employed by the Greeks to express contempt or aversion. We discussed love ; and as the conversation warmed and the wine went round, the young soldier's eyes grew brighter and brighter. He would roar with laughter, toss back his head with the thick black hair, or gaze round him with a melancholy and expressive air. In the end he picked up his glass and threw it through a small window in the corner of the room, shattering the pane. It seemed a good and appropriate idea. We all followed suit. The proprietor entered the room, and, with a beaming face, watched the last volleys being discharged. He pointed out the price of the pane of glass and of the drinking vessels themselves ; then he went to fetch us more wine and more glasses. This time he sat and drank with us, and, when the wine was finished, it seemed to us natural to throw the new glasses also through the window. The proprietor offered his own glass to the young soldier for destruction, pointing out that, though at one period of his life he had enjoyed breaking glasses, now he had lost the inclination to do so. Our momentary impulse, however absurd, had been to us satisfactory ; nor did we grudge the extra shilling or two that we had to pay. And to the proprietor it did not appear that an irresponsible and harmless action was either wicked or unnatural.

In the evening the same party of us returned to the same taverna. It was now much fuller than it had been at midday. Indeed it was necessary, as is very often the case in Greece, to shout across the narrow table in order to make oneself audible. Chairs were wedged against the backs of other chairs, and it was difficult to move until later in the night when the place began to empty. It is a rare thing for any keeper of a taverna to admit that his taverna is full if a table and a chair can be

found anywhere in the neighbourhood. Once found, it is somehow intruded among the other tables and chairs ; nor do those who are thus compelled to huddle together in a restricted space ever seem to object to the procedure. If they had had secrets to discuss, they would have gone somewhere else. As it is they are quite content to shout their conversations to each other ; nor is it in the least uncommon for a party either at the end or in the course of a meal to burst into song. If the song interests their neighbours, either for itself or the singer's sake, they too will join in the singing and so an acquaintance may be struck up between the two tables.

So it was with us on this particular evening. As the room gradually emptied the singing began and, after one of our party had sung a Cretan song, the proprietor placed on our table a large blue mug of retsina, indicating that it was the gift of the occupants of the next table, one of whom was a Cretan himself. Later we returned the compliment and soon the two tables were brought together ; songs and anecdotes were exchanged ; more retsina was provided.

Our new acquaintances were three middle-aged men, all somewhat stout and one slightly bald. This one was the Cretan. He had a long and drooping moustache. His eyes would narrow as he sang in a soft voice words which glorified his island : "If a man is not a warrior and an expert in the use of arms, it is not fitting that he should set foot upon the island of Crete," or : "My Crete, beautiful island and crown of the Levant, the soil of your earth is silver and your rock is diamonds."

The other two would listen with indulgent smiles, joining from time to time in the chorus. Then there was gossip and an exchange of information as to our names and occupations. It appeared that these men were chauffeurs. Their cars, or two



*H*o—Mount Hy netus *B* low—Mount Penteli

V = C





Angelos Sikelianos



George Seferis in Pergamon



George Psaris



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of them, they told us, were in a side street, and they invited us to come with them to another taverna, a little distance away. It was a place, they said, kept by one of their friends. The wine was excellent. It was also possible, if one liked, to get hashish cigarettes.

We accepted the invitation with alacrity, though for a moment the young Greek soldier and the girl, his friend, seemed to hesitate. They looked at each other seriously for a second, then shrugged their shoulders and joined with the rest of us in our mood of gaiety. We had long forgotten what the time was or whether or not it would be necessary to rise early on the following morning.

Then we left the taverna and entered the large and comfortable cars which belonged, I think, to some foreign embassy or other. We drove through the centre of the city, past the clangling trams and the brilliant lights, past Constitution Square and the big hotels. The cafés were full, the cars and pedestrians fewer in number than during the day, and our own vehicles moved rapidly through the bright streets. At this time I had little knowledge of the geography of Athens, and before long had no idea in which direction we were going. Soon big buildings gave place to suburban villas. Dappled trees rimmed the road whose surface got worse and worse. The lights became fewer, and still the highpowered cars plunged into the darkness, swaying slightly as they skirted pot-holes, but going smoothly and fast, considering the state of the road, expertly driven.

I was in the second of the two cars and with me was one Englishman who spoke Greek together with the young Greek soldier and the young poetess. For five minutes or so we continued to laugh and talk as we had been doing in the

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taverna, but after a little time I noticed that the young Greek was beginning to show signs of nervousness and exasperation. He fidgeted in his seat, kept peering through the windows and addressing questions to the driver, who answered cheerfully, though laconically, without turning his head. The two young people began to whisper to each other in an excited manner ; my English friend joined in the discussion ; he appeared to be endeavouring to reassure them on some point or other. Finally the young man turned to me. Both his face and his voice expressed the greatest agitation. "I am very sorry," he said. "If I was alone, it would be all right, but I am thinking of her," and he turned to the girl who was leaning back in the car, her large eyes calm and watchful, her body still and relaxed. "You see," he went on, "we don't know these men. We are right outside Athens already. It may be all right, but it may not be. I'm going to stop anyhow."

He started to speak loudly and urgently to the driver, who now, in a gesture of expostulation, lifted his hands from the steering wheel for a second. I knew just enough Greek to understand that he was saying that we had nearly arrived, that everything was all right, that he was somewhat offended by the suggestions made to him. His words only served to release in the young Greek a pent-up energy and exasperation. He rose from his seat and fixed his powerful hands on the driver's throat, threatening evidently to throttle him unless he stopped immediately. For a moment it seemed as though the driver would resist him and that we should be involved in some kind of a fight. Fortunately my English friend was a man of tact and succeeded quickly in saying things appropriate enough for the occasion. The car stopped and the two Greeks got out. We left them standing in the dark road, uncertain whether to wait

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for a car on its way to Athens or to walk back along the way that we had come.

We proceeded in the darkness after the other car. I myself could scarcely understand the conduct of my companions. I had seen merely that they, who were by no means nervous or cowardly people, had been genuinely frightened. I began to wonder whether we ourselves could be in any danger. The darkness of the night and our isolation in the darkness produced an atmosphere very different from that of the crowded tables, the singing, the red faces and the wine that we had left behind us. After a rapid and emphatic conversation with the driver, my friend explained that the two others had begun to fear that they were being kidnapped ; that in fact it was not so long ago that hostages had been taken to the mountains ; that, though neither of the two was either particularly wealthy or in any way involved in politics, they had relations who, no doubt, would be able to produce, if necessary, a ransom ; that he personally, who had been in Greece since 1944, could not disapprove of their action, though he was sorry that it had, as was natural, caused offence to the driver.

Soon we came to a small house, isolated and set back from the road. It may have been on the way to Parnes ; it may have been in some other direction. Cars were drawn up outside and when we also had drawn up there, we found the rest of our party waiting for us. There were long explanations, angry interpolations from one of the drivers, finally laughter, though there was a touch of grimness too about the laughter. Our friends' mistake was acknowledged to be not only regrettable but also, unfortunately, understandable. In the end some of us, in one of the cars, went back along the road and found them still waiting, somewhat disconsolately, since there had been no

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sign of any traffic in the direction of Athens, where we had left them. They willingly accepted our assurances and apologised to the driver for their unjustified suspicions. He, for his part, preserved for a short time an expression of wounded dignity ; but, perhaps because the right was so obviously on his side, soon relaxed, and, before long, we were all seated inside the small road-house or taverna and were being entertained with slices of octopus and retsina. W^m may also have had some hashish cigarettes, but this I cannot remember. It is a drug which I have never sampled except in small quantities, and it has never had, so far as I could discover, any effect on me of any kind.

I remember that the light in this taverna was unusually and unpleasantly brilliant ; that we were hospitably welcomed and that it was not until very late that we returned in the same cars to Athens. What was memorable, apart from the gaiety of the day, was the thought that in the middle of this gaiety there could be a not unreasonable anticipation of danger. Along the roads going northwards from Athens there had been marched, not long ago, processions of hostages, often barefooted and often collapsing by the way. These processions had been taken as far as Thebes and beyond Thebes. Some had been returned home, thousands had not. Not long ago the corpses of several hundred prisoners, some of them horribly mutilated, had been exhumed in the suburb of Peristeri. Such facts one reads in newspapers and in war books, together often with the most ingenious explanations of or apologies for them. Here I am merely recalling an unimportant incident, yet one that indicates the existence of a reasonable fear even at the centre of things and in the safest places and among people neither timorous by nature nor committed to any political movement. It is by no means my purpose to attempt any kind of descrip-

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tion of the civil war in Greece. I shall be concerned chiefly with sights and sounds, colours and places. Violence, savagery, poverty, irreconcilable hatreds are not part of my theme, yet it is only too true that they exist. If I refer to them only occasionally, it is not because I am ignorant of their presence, but because I am attempting to describe other aspects of the scene which are as real and will be, I hope, more permanent. Admiration, when I think of this country, invariably outweighs despair or disgust or pity. I cannot blame the Greeks for being unwilling to conform to the Russian pattern or for being, politically, un-English. Unlike some journalists, I did not make up my mind about Greece before I left London, and, in the sense of precisely knowing what is right and what is wrong, I have not made my mind up about it yet. I shall be told, no doubt, that in describing what had delighted me, I am deliberately throwing a veil over what could delight no one at all. Once, I remember, in Paris I unguardedly admitted to what I imagined was an agreeable woman journalist that I enjoyed my life in Athens. "Athens!" she wrote of me next day, "where his compatriots are murdering the democrats!" I happened to know that my compatriots were doing nothing of the kind, and that an ability to enjoy oneself is not necessarily a sign of monarcho-fascist sympathies any more than a hatred of injustice is a necessary mark of communism. Yet any picture of Greece that is either unexpected or even not precisely adapted to some ready made political conclusion is apt, I know, to arouse in some sections of the press a kind of priggishness or effrontery or both. Let me admit again, what few journalists are prepared to do, that I am ignorant. Yet not so ignorant as not to see the futility of easy solutions, the inhumanity of learned criticism that lacks love, and the arrogance of impossible advice.

The Ancient Theatres

LEAVING PSARAS and imagining a place for lunch, we were led into a digression. Supposing now that we start again from the road of Bacchus. It is only a short distance from the main road that goes uphill past the theatres of Dionysus and of Herodes Atticus to the Propylaea and entrance to the Acropolis.

The antiquities of Greece are not very numerous, and visits to them are attended by no kind of fuss. One seems rather to happen upon than be directed to great ruins like the temple at Nemea or vast structures like the theatre of Epidaurus. They stand naturally and unpretentiously in their own right, uncommercialized and open to view without the intermediation of rapacious or officious guides.

So, walking up this gradual ascent, one comes to a green iron gate on the right and sees beyond the gate trees and fragments of columns and of statuary. Entering the gate, one will notice children playing among the fallen stones, women in black dresses sitting on the ground in the shade or on benches or on the remains of monuments. Straight ahead, above the trees and above a slight rise in the ground are the sheer high walls of the southern face of the Acropolis, and a few steps up hill will take us to the theatre of Dionysus.

To this place in the 6th century B.C. the tyrant Pisistratus introduced the god Dionysus Eleuthereus. The god came from the mountain fortress of Eleutherae that guards the pass into

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Attica from Boeotia, a rocky citadel from which the remains of a strong castle still look down upon the winding road that ascends the shoulders of Cithaeron to the pass that surmounts the great plain of Thebes. In his own place the god had a title which means "clothed in a black goat-skin". Here in Athens in the spring the god, or his statue, witnessed the first beginning and the rapid spectacular discovery of the art of tragedy, a word which means "goat-song", but whose precise application is still disputed by scholars. It may refer to the prize of a goat awarded to the winning choir of early competing singers; it may refer to the costumes of the choruses in the satyric plays which, later, followed the tragedies proper; it may refer to something different altogether.

There seems to be something appropriate in the fact that it was the god Dionysus who presided over this new spectacular art which provokes pity and terror, purging the mind by the contemplation of what is often ruinous, irrational and, by human standards, unjust, which also elevates the understanding by forcing upon us the recognition of necessity, by revealing together both the abjectness and the dignity of man. For Dionysus was a popular god and the tragedies performed in his honour were popular too. It was not only in Athens itself, where the art originated, that vast crowds would throng the theatre; we hear also of performances in Piraeus, Salamis, Eleusis and other places.

This god did not appeal to the aristocratic audiences of Homer and is rarely mentioned by him. Indeed the myths describing his entry into Greece seem to indicate a revolutionary force, irresistible and dangerous to established ways. His religion was one of ecstasy, and his worshippers, particularly the women, clad in fawn skins, dancing on the mountains,

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tearing animals to pieces and eating the raw flesh, gifted often with miraculous powers, shocked and alarmed all those who, like Pentheus, imagined that the whole of wisdom could be precisely set down in legal ordinances, that surprise was not an element of reality, that their philosophies were capable of containing all the things in heaven and earth.

In the pure light of Athens sanity has often succeeded in admitting and in reconciling opposites. So the Erinyes, with their exact and furious interpretation of justice, were settled in Athens as "the kindly goddesses". And in the case of Dionysus the extreme fury of his cult seemed to disappear as it came southwards from the tragic and bloody slopes of Cithaeron. His power was recognised, the power of emotional explosion, of ecstasy, of the unexpected and irregular ; and, under his auspices, there came into existence what is perhaps the most moving and far-ranging of the literary arts. Opposing ideas, violent emotions, catastrophe were of the essence of the new way of writing ; yet these appeared in a structure and with a form that gave unity to what was divergent, dignity and force to elements that might have been unbridled or destructive.

Little, if anything, remains today of the rounded open space, or orchestra, where first the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were performed. In those days there were wooden seats climbing the slopes of the Acropolis hill, and it was not till the 4th century B.C. that the grey stone auditorium and orchestra which we now see were built. The present theatre would hold, it is estimated, more than fifteen thousand spectators.

Wild thyme grows in the cracks between the ascending rows of seats and between the paving stones. The whole great semicircle seems a part of the hill and, in spite of its size,

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curiously intimate. Here in the 4th century took place not only dramatic performances but also the regular assemblies of the whole Athenian people. From these slopes there must once, indeed very recently, have extended a magnificent view, with Hymettus on the left, islands and the sea in front, a view which is now interrupted by modern buildings. Less than a hundred years ago all this was open country, and it was over bare rocks that here took place some of the battles between the Turks and the white-kilted warriors of the War of Independence, whom we can still see depicted in the paintings of Makraianis, a warrior himself, whose pictorial and literary record of the war, which includes some interesting representations of Queen Victoria and of the monarchs of France and Russia, are of very great charm and interest. Indeed these slopes with behind them the sheer walls of Cimon, the general who carried the war into the coasts of Persia and who brought back to Athens from Scyros the giant bones of Theseus, have been the scene of innumerable marchings and counter-marchings of troops,— Persian, Spartan, Macedonian, troops from the Kingdoms of Pontus, Cappadocia, Pergamon and Syria, Romans, the armies of Byzantium, Normans and Franks, Florentines, Venetians and Turks. The troops have gone, wholly forgotten except by some historians. They can be imagined but scarcely imagined as disturbing the peculiar sanctity of this hollow in the hill where the wild thyme pushes upwards from cracks in the stone, where a few mothers sit and children play, this unpretentious, quiet and decorous place, scarcely a ruin, where, in the space of one brilliant generation, was developed and perfected a mode of art and thought of greater spiritual importance than anything which can be represented by the remains or monuments of any other single locality in the world.

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Of the other ancient buildings that used to exist on these slopes little or nothing remains. Near here, some say, used to be the tomb of Hippolytus, or else a monument to him and, perhaps, that temple to Aphrodite which Phaedra, performing an act of piety which failed to satisfy her passions, had made to look out across the sea towards Troezen where the young man lived. Now the only building which remains is the great theatre of Herodes Atticus, the sophist and millionaire who lived in the first century A.D. and who devoted much of his wealth and time to the support of the arts and to the beautifying and adorning of Athens. This theatre is higher up the hill than the theatre of Dionysus, indeed almost at the entrance to the Acropolis itself. In its early days it was regarded as a building of peculiar splendour. Its raised stage was covered with a roof of cedar wood and the steep high tiers of seats could accommodate many more people than could the older theatre. These tiers of seats rise directly into the side of the hill and the theatre itself was at one time incorporated into the scheme of Turkish fortifications. It is still used in the summer for concerts and for dramatic performances. It is a noble and important structure, admirably adapted to its function. Is it, I wonder, the Roman style, something finally boring about all the artistic achievements, other than literature, of the Roman genius, that makes one anxious to leave this imposing edifice? Round the corner to the right is the entrance to the Propylaea. One is anxious to ascend the rock itself, although if one could curb one's anxiety, one might well go first a little distance to the left and ascend the hill of Philopappos, not many yards away, by a path winding among the low pine trees or over bare rock. From this path and from the summit of the hill one will see at no great distance, solid, shining and

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indescribably graceful, the Parthenon itself with all the fine ascent of the Propylaea as well. It is a view of extraordinary beauty, and it must remain a matter of opinion whether it is better for one's first view of the Parthenon to be from here,—a view of something exquisite, neither hung in the bright air nor yet stubbornly anchored to any earth—or whether it is better still to see it first as something which one can touch with one's hands, and in the shadow of whose delicate and robust columns one can stand. It was from the hill of Philopappos in the darkness of a September evening in 1687 that the Venetian artillery landed a shell in the Turkish powder magazine inside the Parthenon and destroyed a great part of what must then have been the most perfectly preserved, as well as the most beautiful, of all works of Greek architecture. Its beauty is still miraculous ; and this view of it, from the destructive hill, is among the most beautiful of all views. It is unique in its closeness and its clarity and from its particular elevation. And again there is, in this as in all views of the Acropolis, something natural and, with all the surprise, unobtrusive. The Acropolis is not a hill that towers into the air, effacing or dominating the scene. It catches one unawares, like a brilliant face perceived among a crowd or in isolation from the rest. Indeed it is itself and various from any distance, from the slopes of Hymettus or from Lycabettus, from the southern road to the sea, from the descent into Athens from Daphni. So, and almost beyond others, the view from Philopappos is recommended ; but here I am imagining a natural impatience and so shall attempt to describe the ordinary ascent to the place itself.

The Acropolis

AND IN writing of the Acropolis I shall not attempt the accuracy or the exhaustiveness of a guide book or of an archaeological study. Not that I would dispute the necessity of the one and the extreme interest of the other. Yet to be really discursive on this subject would be to plunge into so vast a stream of history that we might miss, rising and falling among its waves, much that might otherwise have met the eye. True that we are in the stream, or shall we call it, changing the metaphor, a sea or lake through which we move, as in the myth of Plato, like fishes. Yet there are moments when our heads project above the surface and we see a different world. It is as though the "old palaces and towers" which the poet imagined as "quivering within the wave's intenser ray" ceased to quiver and were discovered in a daylight that is in fact more intense than any submarine illumination. In so many ways research and investigation, precise knowledge of topography, conjecture and concatenation of evidence are valuable and stimulating. But there are moments when all this is of no immediate or fundamental importance, when a building, a view, a gesture or an experience seems to swim or be fixed not underneath but above the wave of history and interconnection, to state itself in the words that Moses heard "I am that I am".

So in visiting the Acropolis it has often seemed to me not unreasonable to forget to compare the present approach to the Propylaea with what we know of the original project of

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Pisistratus, to forget even to imagine the Panathenaic processions ascending the steep way to the new temple, to forget the Pelasgian walls, the lost statues, and the marbles detained in the British Museum. What can be seen surpasses what can be imagined. It surpasses also, most completely, what can be recorded by means of a camera ; for here one is conscious, however one's eyes are focused on a particular object, of the whole sky above one, of a vast plain, of mountains, the sea, islands and distant coasts, of the rock itself on which one is standing. Then there is the colour, the sparkle or glow of marble against the blue sky and white drifting clouds. These and other untranslatable elements are indeed often present in views of extraordinary beauty or grandeur. But here, as I face the Propylaea or the Parthenon itself, I am conscious of some element that distinguishes this scene from others. One might call this element "perfection" or one might call it "simplicity" and still not be near the mark, except in so far as one had indicated a quality that evokes a full admiration and silences criticism.

Climbing the steep ascent to the hill one comes to the Propylaea, the delicate and massive porch or entrance to the sacred citadel. Of this building Mr. Osbert Lancaster, a critic who is by no means prone to indiscriminate admiration, writes : "The Propylaea remains the most impressive entrance with which any man-made structure has ever been provided." He rightly points out too that the building is not only beautiful in itself, but perfectly adapted to its purpose of introducing one to the view of the Parthenon beyond it and above it.

With this prospect in front of one, though no doubt one will pause frequently to look backwards and around, one may well leave unvisited for the moment the small temple of Wingless

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Victory on the right. Beyond the Propylaea, over the grey uneven rock, bearing rather to the right in the direction of Hymettus, one will ascend till one comes to the few steep steps above which rise the gleaming shafts of those Doric columns whose grace and power and order support and create a wonder of the world.

It may be that to some minds the adjective "Doric" will recall the severity of Sparta, the idea of some sort of plain-song, a military dance or the morality of Plato. Such ideas belong to the word, but it is also used correctly by Sir Henry Wotton who wrote to the young Milton of "a certain Dorique delicacy in your Songs and Odes, whereunto I must plainly confess to have seen yet nothing parallel in our language : *Ipsa mollities*". And, if the architecture of the Parthenon presents us, as it does, with impressions of grandeur, precision and monumental strength, it is equally true that these qualities are blended with, refined and, in a miraculous way, reinforced by a kind of delicacy, which, if it did not so leap to and fill the eyes, would seem unearthly. "Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, Luxe, calme et volupté."

Standing beneath these columns one will certainly, as before now one will have done, look round at the wide circle of mountains and sea in which Athens is placed. Suppose first, before walking perhaps to the end of the rock or else over to the left, one turns round and looks back in the direction of the sea. On the left is the long line of Hymettus, a line that gradually declines to the coast and the brilliant blue of the water and the sky. There, in the sea, is the conical shape of the mountain in the island of Aegina, and beyond that the distant line of other islands and of the Peloponnesian coast. Further to the right is Piraeus, and the humped mound of Castella. Then

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there is Salamis and mountains again beyond it. On a clear day, it is said that one can see so far up the Saronic gulf that the citadel of Acrocorinth is visible.

And now, perhaps, one will shift one's position, looking to the right. There is Mount Aegaleos, above Eleusis ; there is the great brown plain with its patches of green and ascending ground in the direction of the towering wooded peaks of Parnes, marked across its massive front by the zig-zags of the climbing road that ends among the pine trees. And, as one turns and follows the lines of more mountains beyond the extent of plain, one will see, quite near at hand, indeed well within the city, the peak of Lycabettus, and, away behind it, as one turns further, the third great mountain of the Attic plain, Penteli, from which came the marble that shines in the clear air. And from the graceful, almost remote, slopes of Penteli the eye turns again to the nearer line of Hymettus and to its shadowy folds.

Within this circle or crown lies the city itself, brown, yellow and white, covering an enormous stretch of ground. To the south clearly marked roads extend to the sea, linking Athens with Piraeus. The rising ground and the plain to the west and north are full of houses and the eye can distinguish the point where the new industrial suburbs have sprung up beyond the more pretentious architecture of the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. Few, if any, of these houses are in themselves anything but ugly. Yet in this light the general impression which they make is not displeasing. Indeed, for some extraordinary reason, this sprawling mass of shoddy or dilapidated architecture seems to take on or absorb some of the beauty of the landscape and to appear, not incongruous, but appropriate.

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To see the main centre of Athens and to observe how it is dwarfed by the suburbs that push out in all directions into the plain one will have to walk a little farther, leaving the Parthenon behind one and the Erechtheum on the left. One will look over the northern walls down into the Plaka and find in the small red-roofed houses and the twisting alleys the only architecture in the city that is really distinguished. Among these houses small Byzantine churches stand like jewels. There are gardens and bright patches of colour where clothes are drying or blankets and rugs hang in the sun. And below the Plaka one will see the modern Cathedral, Syntagma Square, the big hotels and, away to the left, the University and the busy Omonia Square, with residential and industrial suburbs beyond. Then, springing out of the centre of the city, is the steep cone of Lycabettus with the white church on its summit. Beyond is the Turko-vouno and the suburbs of Psychico, Maroussi, and Cephisia, extending as far as the slopes of Penteli with its gleaming quarries.

Name after name, building upon building comes into the mind, and fascinating certainly it is to trace in the bright sunlight the landmarks of the spreading city bathed in so clear an atmosphere, encircled with so various and splendid a scene of mountains and plain and coast-lines. Yet in the daylight it is the surrounding scene, with the Acropolis itself, that is really remarkable. Even so vast a city is belittled and made inconsiderable by the grandeur of its surroundings and the perfection of its centre. It is at night that its full size is best perceived. Then the whole plain sparkles with innumerable lights. Down by the sea, behind Piraeus, there rises what is like a hedge-hog of bristling illumination. Now thick, now scattered in brilliant points, millions of electric bulbs, in whose

The Acropolis

use no government has even yet succeeded in imposing what an English official would describe as economy, shine and twinkle for mile after mile. High on Lycabettus stands the light of its church and, if one is watching the scene at Easter time, one will see, crossing and recrossing the steep face of the hill, the lines of numberless worshippers carrying back their lighted candles to their houses. So in all directions the brilliance spreads and makes the city appear bigger than Rome and bigger than London. Yet even at such times one is as conscious as ever of the rock and of its buildings. As the moonlight drenches the columns and the rough ground, or as ragged clouds cross the moon and spread intermittent shadows over this high place, so one feels still the elevation that is both real and, in a way, mystical. Viewed from this timeless citadel the shining lights in their vast extent seem not only beautiful but pathetic, intensely real but known to be evanescent, washing against the feet of mountains and washed by the distant sea.

But now we are imagining the place in daylight. I have attempted to emphasise the "Dorique delicacy" of the great temple, the sanctity of the ground, the brilliance and splendour of its surroundings. I have indeed merely expressed what is well known, often said and easily admitted by those who have seen the sight. Opinions are more likely to differ with regard to the other temple on the Acropolis, the Erechtheum, whose style, contrasting so completely with that of the Parthenon, charms some tastes and offends others. Mr. Osbert Lancaster is frankly appalled that the Greeks, of all people, could have invented the caryatid. Others find in this building an example of femininity which stands in appropriate connection with the male strength of the Parthenon. To me the Erechtheum seems

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not only beautiful in itself but also aptly to illustrate that element of variety, even of contradiction, that one finds constantly in Greece. The thin Ionic columns, the careful and graceful decoration of doors and cornices,—all this may be described as finicky or as feminine. The different planes on which the building is constructed, the porch of the maidens which so stirs the fury of Mr. Lancaster, everything seems to be made to express variety in detail, a gracious and not an overwhelming surprise. With all the profusion of decoration there is a kind of modesty about this Ionic temple to which Dorians were not allowed access. It is a place of peace and calm, a fitting sanctuary for the commemoration of the old quarrel and the lasting agreement between Athene and Poseidon. Though it invites rather than challenges or fills the eye, the invitation is, to me, both acceptable and delightful. The style recalls neither the glories of empire, the toils of war, the massive or exact triumphs of the intellect ; instead the building seems to hint at the different life of island principalities, the courts of Samos or of Egypt, even Antioch and Alexandria, since this Ionic spirit, luxurious and, like the early statues of women with their delicate robes and hair, somewhat inscrutable in expression, reaches both forwards and backwards in time. It has its own purity, a purity expressed rather than impaired by what, from a strict Dorian point of view, might appear to be vagaries or affectations. Here, on the Acropolis, it is properly displayed in a building whose complications somehow achieve an effect of a miraculous intimacy, so that it seems, not ridiculous, but natural, however surprising, for maidens to be carrying so great a weight of marble on their heads. They too, like the frieze and pediments of the Parthenon, have suffered from what the French guide book describes as

The Acropolis

the “rapines brutales de Lord Elgin,” and indeed few Englishmen, standing on this holy ground, can find themselves able to approve of the action of their countryman. Those famous marbles were made for an atmosphere of sun and clear air and open windy skies. And, inadequate in every way as my description of this place has been, I have at least, I hope, indicated that it is a place as different from Bloomsbury as could possibly be imagined. I have never yet discovered an argument why the marbles should not be restored at once to the positions and to the atmosphere for which they were designed.

Daphni

THE FIGURES of the ancient gods are like the figures of men ; and classical architecture reflects a stupendous but real landscape ; it uses and, in its own way, confirms the lines and shapes of its surroundings. Yet we know that the life of the ancient Greeks was by no means concerned only with out-of-doors activities or with logical demonstrations. The spiritual and irrational played a far greater part than is usually acknowledged by schoolmasters. Even the art of the theatre was, as we have seen, devoted to Dionysus and along the coast, at Eleusis, was the centre of the mysteries of which we know little except that they were of the utmost importance to the whole people. At all times the Greek genius has been various, nor can it be said that Byzantine art and architecture are less expressive of the country and the people than are the quick, brilliant and perfect achievements of the classical age. True that the Parthenon seems to hold and poised in itself the lines of Hymettus and Penteli, whereas a Byzantine church may remind one more of a barrel than of a mountain. True that classical statues are made to be open to the eye, while Byzantine mosaics are more private and concealed. Yet in this country what might seem in the colder northern air to be irreconcilables are naturally and easily combined. So Apollo, Dionysus and Christ have been worshipped together or at different times by the same people in the same places, nor is it incongruous to-day for the modern poet Sikelianos to bring

Daphni

Christ and Dionysus together in his verse. So the Propylaea combine features of the Ionic and the Doric styles. So the liturgies of the Greek Church contain elements that suggest the songs sung in the worship of Adonis.

Unfortunately in the west and perhaps particularly in England where, as a rule, those who are educated in the classics are very well instructed in a few things, it has come to be believed that Greek history ends with the death, if not with the birth, of Alexander the Great, and that the whole achievement of Byzantium is a more or less discreditable decline or fall. And as for our few Byzantine scholars who in recent years have done much to enlighten us, they are often forced by the very strength of the opposition to denigrate the achievements of the earlier age. It is time that the quarrel was composed and that we realized, as all Greeks realize, that this is a country full of divergencies which are all natural, that just as the word "Greek" can be applied to democracy and imperialism, to athletic sport and to private contemplation, to sensuality and to asceticism, so it is the right adjective for the age of Pericles and for the age of Justinian.

Near Athens, at Daphni, along the Sacred Way, or at Kaisariani on Mount Hymettus, the two worlds are close together; but though the differences are marked and the beauties separate, both difference and beauty are appropriate to what is real.

Leaving Athens by the road to Eleusis which for part of the distance follows the ancient track along which for some 1800 years the worshippers used periodically to go to attend the Mysteries, a road once flanked with tombs and temples but now filled with buses, lorries and donkey carts loaded with vegetables, one begins, after 8 kilometres or so, to ascend the

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slopes of Mount Aegaleos, which lies between the road and the sea. It is the mountain where once Xerxes sat on a golden throne to watch the destruction of his fleet in the bay of Salamis. Looking back from these slopes one will see Athens and the Acropolis in what many regard as the best of all lights, particularly at sunset when the whole distant range of Hymettus will take on its own particular and entrancing hues of pink, of violet and of blue.

From here the road descends a little and one comes to a group of yellow tavernas. On both sides are rocky hills, though round the corner in front, out of sight, is the bay of Salamis with Eleusis across the bay. To the left is a little avenue of oleanders and above the oleanders a wood of pine trees, shining green against the red rock and earth. A brown wall surrounds the monastery of Daphni, where, though it is beside the main road and a stone's throw from the cafés and the traffic, one will feel immediately remote from the great city one has left and from the long roads that extend from it.

It is a small building yet somehow it contrives to give one the idea of size. It is compact, yet conveys no impression of restriction. Here too, as in the case of the Parthenon, an effect of peace and of precision has been obtained by complicated means, nor, in the first moments of one's admiration, is one inclined to investigate the means that have been employed. And the colour of the building is as satisfying as its shape. It stands out in a gold-brown among the green of pines and oleanders, the white and red of rocky mountain slopes,—abrupt walls, rounded windows, the weighty dome poised naturally and firmly on the solid and graceful structure.

The entrance is through a courtyard. Standing here with the pointed arches of cloisters in front, with the sunlight streaming

Daphni

down on the church itself and on the white balcony and climbing plants to the right of the porch which is flanked by tall cypresses pressed against the yellow walls, one is conscious again, as so often in this country, of the sanctity of a particular spot. Indeed the ground is sacred and has been consecrated to various religious rites. Here once stood a temple to Apollo which was destroyed about A.D. 400. In the course of the next two centuries the first Christian monastery was built on the site. The present church with its mosaics dates from the end of the 11th century. But the Orthodox monks were not long left in peaceful possession of their new and splendid edifice. In 1205 the building was sacked by the crusaders and soon afterwards a Frankish Duke of Athens installed the Cistercians at Daphni. After another two hundred years the Cistercians in their turn were driven out by Mahomet II. In the 16th century it was once more occupied by the monks of the Orthodox religion, and was finally abandoned by them at the time of the War of Independence.

What remained and still remains in this vexed spot is the finely conceived and firmly established monument of one short period in this long history, a moment in the 11th century, a moment of supreme beauty and inspiration.

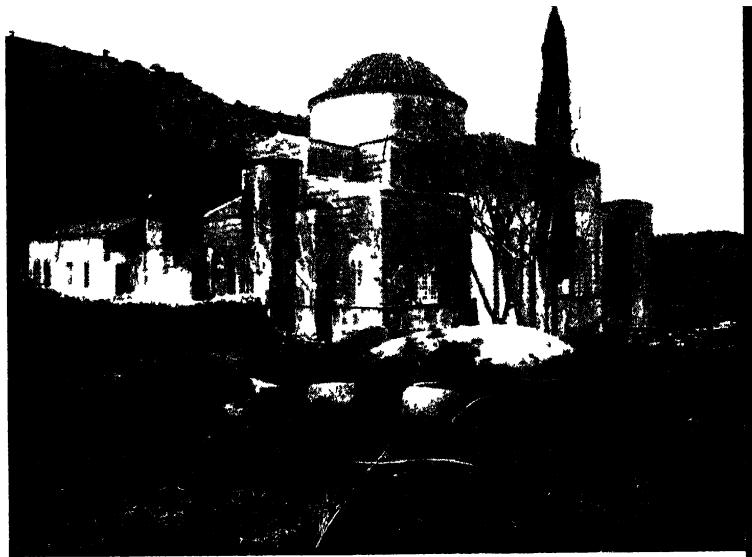
Inside the church in the cooler light, the high walls and piers rise to support the dome from which looks down the tremendous mosaic picture of the Almighty. The height seems greater than one knows it to be in reality ; but here the effect of height is not, as in some Gothic buildings, to draw the eyes upwards towards something shadowy or indistinct. Here, as in the Parthenon, something of spiritual value is expressed by solidity, clarity and proportion. There is no mystification, no fumbling, nothing quaint, nothing that reaches in the direction

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of the impossible. Instead, what is miraculous is what is possible and real and open to inspection.

First, perhaps, it will be this perfection of the architecture that will hold and fascinate the eye. But soon the vision will become concentrated and fixed on limited expanses of wall or vault or dome where the famous mosaics shine or glimmer in gold and blue or paler colours.

In the dome itself is the huge figure of the head and shoulders of Christ the Pantokrator. It is a figure of stupendous power and authority. The piercing eyes, the long index finger clasping the jewelled book will seem to follow one as moves below, and here in particular the curvature of the gives a depth and a concentration to the picture that can scarcely be reproduced on a flat surface. Tremendously imposing as is this artist's vision of Christ, what will again, perhaps, seem most impressive is its reality. Here, certainly, are eyes "acquainted with sorrow", but they are also severe and capable of penetrating anything in the nature of an illusion. Here indeed is a God who is not mocked, a God who, in this respect, may remind one of the Christ in Piero della Francesca's Resurrection and, in other respects, of the work of El Greco ; but a God who is as far as can be from those common artistic conceptions of the West to which such adjectives as "gentle", "meek", "benevolent", "long-suffering" or "charming" may often be applied. Here the severity of brow and mouth is not due to any contraction of the muscles ; the searching eyes are capable both of sympathy and of accurate judgment ; the delicate lean fingers are strong. Every line, even the two straggling hairs on the forehead, has powerful significance. And the bright book, whether Bible or Book of Judgment, held in that long hand, seems to embody a doctrine



The Church at Daphni

Daphni. The Presentation of the Virgin

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Daphni The Nativity



Daphni. The Baptism



Illustration

Daphni The Christ of the Resurrection

Daphni

that is irrefutable and vital. Here is Man raised above the stature of Man, the Christian God represented as possessing fully the power and the wisdom necessary to supplant Apόllo and Zeus. Something new, certainly, has entered the world of artistic imagination with those long curved fingers and that hierophantic book. Something new too in the look of the eyes. But one would like to know whether any of that combination of dignity and reality was descended or re-created from the great lost statues of the past that were hidden away from the light, though shining in gold and ivory, in the inner temples of Zeus at Olympia and of Athene on the Acropolis. Reality (not realism) and power are words that constantly come to the mind in any consideration of Greek art at any period. So far as this period of the 11th century is concerned, it would be hard to imagine anyone, however committed to one side of a false opposition, who, after looking at the picture of Christ in Daphni, could use the word "decadence" of Byzantine art.

The other mosaics too are of singular and amazing beauty. The portraits of saints, patriarchs and angels, however conventional may be the stance or the attributes, have each their own vivid individuality. The archangel Michael, with his billowing wings and jewelled staff stands like a Hermes or Apollo, gifted with greater powers of flight. Prophets and old saints have their peculiar dignity and among them are the pictures of resolute, handsome and gifted young men, such as the saints Sergius and Bacchus. As for the scenes from the life of Christ and of the Virgin, they are different from, but no less moving, in their loving attention to detail and in the piety and purity of their conception, than are the greatest works of the painters of Florence. In the Nativity, among the rocks and spiky

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vegetation (which, incidentally, is a characteristic of the modern painting of Ghika) rays of light stream from above on to the cradle over the edge of which peep the minute heads of an ox and an ass. Mary looks out upon the world with the dignity of a goddess ; the pose of Joseph is charmingly and appropriately human. Then in the corner, standing by his sheep that strangely resemble dachshunds is a shepherd tugging somewhat incredulously at his beard, while angels with gestures of infinite grace admonish or instruct him.

Indeed the variety and grace of the various representations of angels in these mosaics would in itself deserve a study. In the Baptism the naked body of Christ is seen crossed by the blue lines of the water in which he is immersed. From above a hand extends from heaven and, in the three rays that go from the fingers to the halo of Christ a joyous dove seems to be, as it were, prancing in the air. On one side is the lean devoted figure of John the Baptist and on the other are two angels, hovering with prepared towels. Their sweeping wings and the curves of their necks and shoulders indicate their supernatural powers ; their faces are like the faces of girls from the islands or from the country.

Then there is the angel that appears to St. Anne above a jewelled fountain among the foliage of trees where white doves are perching. There is the angel who, above the exquisite scene of the presentation of the Virgin, flies horizontally through the air with legs kicking behind and appears to be offering to a seated figure a large white egg. In the scene below her a grave priest leans forward with extended hands from the doors of a sanctuary. To him the small figure of the Virgin reaches out her own childish hands, and she herself is protected and introduced by the long expressive hands of the male

Daphni

figure behind her, who inclines forward in a gesture in which pride, respect and ordinary shrewdness seem combined.

Many more of these mosaics might be described, though no description can give anything but the faintest idea of their beauty and their variety. I recall the sad dignity of the Entry to Jerusalem and the long extended neck of the white mule that carries Jesus. Then, near the entrance, is that immensely powerful picture of the Christ of the Resurrection, who crushes Death with the butt end of his cross, and raises with effortless power the weak, aged, almost reluctant body from the tomb.

Leaving the church and emerging again into the bright sun, changing the focus of one's eyes, one sees again the straight cypresses, the pines, the red and white of hillsides. One can imagine, though one cannot see, the famous bay further along the road or the view which, if one is returning to Athens, one will soon have of the windy heights of the Acropolis and of coloured Hymettus. Here too the ground is holy.

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SUPPOSE, HOWEVER, that one does not intend to return immediately by the way one came, that there is time to go further round the bay, not, perhaps, quite so far as Megara, but as far as Megalo Peuko and the monastery of Phaneromeni on the coast of the island of Salamis, a hospitable and sacred place where the Virgin is said once to have appeared.

Soon after Daphni the road descends to the level of the sea, and runs for some distance between the sea on the left and the sacred lakes on the right. There is often a great difference between the colours of the blue of the lakes and the wider blue of the sea of the Saronic gulf. The lakes, with the mountains behind them, are of a sharper colour in certain lights, while the sea, in the light that I am trying to remember, is pale, with something milky in its blue, filling the great bay from Mount Aegaleos and the islands of Psyttaleia and St. George where the great battle was fought, to the curving shores of Salamis and the factory chimneys and clock tower of Eleusis with the mountains of the Megarid beyond. But though I think first of pale and glowing water, I remember also in a different light the deep clear azure of this sea and its various and thousand brilliant shades in the evening when the sun sets behind the Peloponnesian mountains. All this coast of the Saronic gulf is beautiful. There are wide bays, rocky precipitous coves, open expanses of shore with pine trees growing down to the

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water, or, further on, in the direction of Corinth, olives and cultivated ground.

But here I am imagining only the entry to the Bay of Eleusis, with Skaramanga away to the left with its restaurants and another lake well-stocked with cels. For some distance the road follows the sea coast and on the right are shining lakes and the slopes of mountains. About sixteen kilometres from Athens and six from Eleusis the road turns inland across the Thriasian plain. Behind the vines and olives the citadel of Eleusis is visible, also cement and other factories and a clock tower that might have come from any English seaside town.

Of the antiquities of Eleusis I cannot write. Lazily relying on the information of friends and on my own instinct, I have never visited them, though I have passed scores of times by the hill where guide books recommend a three hours' inspection. But every time there seemed to be something more important to do and I still console myself for my laziness by the reflection that I have never yet heard anyone declare that the ruins are, apart from their archaeological interest, worth a moment of the time that can be spent almost everywhere else along this coast. Even when one is in the mood to recall the past, it is, perhaps, more satisfying to people in imagination those remnants of the Sacred Way that are still visible with the gay or reverent throngs of whom we know something from Aristophanes, than to attempt from the mere outlines of massive foundations to reconstruct a picture of rites about which either nothing or next to nothing is known. Thus I have found the road to Eleusis always moving, and very movingly is it described in the famous poem of Sikelianos in which a vision of past, present and future is evoked by the ancient road itself and by the spectacle of a gypsy and his performing

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bears. Almost certainly foolishly I have been neglectful of Eleusis itself, but for the moment it is too late to remedy this defect. I have eaten excellent fish there, have walked rapidly along the waterfront and admired what was in the distance, nearly always anxious either to be back in Athens or else to be going forwards along one or other of the two roads at the junction of roads outside the town.

Of these one turns northward through a red plain and groves of olives. It goes through the village of Mandra, through Eleutherae, Thebes, Levadia to the north. The other left-hand fork is the road to Corinth and the Peloponnese. This is the road we follow if we are to visit the monastery of Phaneromeni on Salamis. Every moment the view of the bay and of the island opposite changes. The famous heights are further on, the other side of Megara, but here too the road winds and circles, crossing at various points the railway line, below which in steep gorges can still be seen the remains of shattered and rusty coaches and wagons. So too in the bay of Salamis, in the harbours of Piraeus and Nauplia and, until quite recently, in the Corinth canal the hulks of sunken ships remain as monuments to the German invasion.

At Megalo Peuko the road is again on a level with the sea. Pine trees grow down to the shore and among the pines are huts, shacks, villas, tavernas, fishermen, boats, children, nets drying, perhaps a flock of black, brown or white lop-eared goats. Here one may go down as far as the place where the waves wash on the shore, and sit at a table, under an awning of pine branches or in the open air, looking across at the island and at the long white monastery opposite. I remember the great wreck of a ship in the channel which here is narrow and the small boats rowed to or from the opposite coast. Perhaps one

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will sit here, in sun or shade, and drink retsinga served either in the familiar blue mugs or from old army bottles that once contained beer. With the wine one will be offered small fish, like sprats, or, as a greater delicacy, shell fish fresh from the sea, on whose white or grey bodies lemon juice will be dropped. A writhing motion under this stimulus will indicate fitness to be eaten. This is indeed a place in which to linger in the warm sun, with the light falling on the sea and the long hills of Salamis, among the pines and the buildings which in any other light would appear mean and sordid, but which here are invested with charm and with a kind of dignity.

I remember in particular one visit to this place. It was a day or two after Easter and I had come with a party of Greek and English friends to visit the poet Sikelianos who was staying, as he often does, in the monastery of Phaneromeni where he was engaged, I think, in the writing of a play. I had attended the Easter celebrations in Athens, the processions in which the effigy of the dead Christ is honoured and mourned, the spectacle of the empty tomb, the long excited waiting till midnight for the Resurrection. In the great official procession every dignitary of Church and State is represented, as are school children, scouts, girl guides, the armed forces, the police, the Universities. Indeed it is something really Panathenaic. Streets and windows along the route are filled with spectators holding their lighted candles. The atmosphere is one of excitement and expectation. The devout have been fasting for at least a week, and there are many more of the devout than one would imagine from the ordinary appearances of manners or conversation. Then there are others who profess no interest in the Church but who, somewhat shamefacedly, keep the fast in Holy Week, explaining it to themselves as a

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gesture either of filial piety or of patriotism. Thus the whole people seems to be involved in these celebrations. Nor is there only one magnificent ceremony. Every church, however small, has its own procession and its own band of worshippers who all night on Easter Saturday will join in or listen to the perpetual singing of those ancient and beautiful hymns that exalt the beauty of the dead and express the sorrow and the reverence of those who mourn for Him. At midnight the climax is reached. By this time not only the churches but the squares and streets outside are thronged with expectant eager crowds, curiously and unusually silent. Then, just before midnight, the bearded priest will emerge from the church or Cathedral. The light of great candles falls upon the bright colours of his robes and of the book from which he begins to read the Gospel. The vast crowds listen eagerly as it were for the news of some great event whose issue is still in doubt. And at last, as midnight strikes, the priest pronounces the words: “Christ is risen” (*Χριστός ἀνέστη*). A sigh of satisfaction, of tension relaxed, of a mounting joy passes over the crowd. Friends and relations turn to each other smiling and clasping each other in their arms as each repeats the good tidings “Christ is risen” and each replies “ἀληθῶς ἀνέστη”, (Yes, he really is risen.)

Meanwhile everything in Athens that is capable of making a loud noise is being fully employed. Guns are firing, the whistles of trains and the sirens of factories are shrieking into the air, fireworks explode on all sides. The hushed crowds begin to talk and laugh at the tops of their voices. Suddenly the streets look gayer and, as friend meets friend, the Easter greetings are exchanged on every side with embraces and every mark of affection. Such scenes will be taking place in every

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village and town of Greece. They seem to me the most genuine and moving of all religious scenes that I have witnessed.

And now under the bright lights and the dark sky above them the crowds will disperse. Friends and families in their own houses or in tavernas will join in the traditional and long-awaited meal. There is soup flavoured with lemon and made from the guts of the Easter sheep or lamb. Then, for those who can afford it, the lamb itself, and afterwards, perhaps, some sweet pancakes. As the wine flows, and as eager appetites are satisfied, the conversation grows louder. Easters in the past are recalled and the recollection of those who are either dead or absent will provoke feelings of tenderness and of generosity. In gaiety and in affection the night will be prolonged as so often nights are prolonged in Athens. Yet the gaiety of this night will have a particular quality, since it is a celebration of something out of the common, though it happens every year and though, perhaps, something not altogether unlike this Christian ceremony has taken place either at Eleusis or beneath the rock of the Acropolis since the beginnings of European civilization.

For some days after Easter it is still customary to exchange the Easter greetings, and for some days there will be at meals or served with drinks baskets or plates full of brightly painted hard-boiled eggs, so that, in a round of morning visits or before lunch, one may easily discover that one has eaten half absent-mindedly what in England might in the war years have constituted one's rations for six months. It is all the easier to forget oneself in the eating of Easter eggs because of a kind of game which the Greeks play with them,—childish, perhaps, but, to me, always fascinating. It is a game somewhat like "conkers" but more satisfying. Each of two people grasps an

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egg in the hand, allowing either the more pointed or the blunter end to protrude above the fist. Then one of the two players smartly taps the exposed portion of his opponent's egg with the corresponding portion of his own. Victory goes to the egg whose shell is not cracked ; and, when one of the ends is broken, the same performance takes place with the other end. It is a game of considerable skill, success in which depends not only on the toughness of one's egg but also on the tension in the muscles of the hand at the moment of impact. When an egg is out of action, it is, of course, at once eaten. Thus, among other advantages, this game provides the weaker player with an immediate reward.

So I remember sitting at a table by the sea opposite Salamis on the day after Easter, playing this game with eggs, eating shell-fish and drinking retsina while we waited for a boat to take us over to Phaneromeni where we were to lunch with Sikelianos. I had met this great poet and distinguished man before. Also I had heard much of him,—of his singular beauty and strength when young, of the great festivals at Delphi which he used to organise before the war, of his courage and of the inspiration which he had afforded to others at the time of the German occupation. There were some who would laugh at what appeared to them an excess of mysticism in his thought ; others (though not, I think, very reputable critics) would deplore an excess of rhetoric in his verse ; still others would regard him as dangerous politically. To me the poetry and the personality of the man are alike remarkable. In his powerful verse there is a hierophantic element, as in some of the greatest poems of Yeats. Like Keats, whom he greatly admires, he is profuse with decoration. As for himself, he seems to be one of those who is always conscious of the

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dignity and splendour of life, one who is, and has been from his earliest youth, spent in the Ionian island of Leucadia, very close to the realities of nature,—rock and sea, trees, animals, the thought and speech of country people. There is an informed and earnest simplicity in his fine eyes, sometimes with the aspect of a seer, sometimes with a look almost of bewilderment, as of some captured bird or of the albatross in the poem of Baudelaire. For neither the history of Greece nor the history of the world has evolved in accordance with the grand hopes and expectations of his early and passionate youth.

On the occasion which I have in mind we had learnt with sorrow that Sikelianos had been ill ; he had insisted nevertheless on entertaining us. While we were in the boat that took us across the water to Salamis many stories were told of him, of his generosity to friends and to rivals, of his residence in Delphi and his wish to make this holy place again the centre of a civilized religion, of how he with George Katsimbalis had led the forbidders singing of the Greek national anthem among the crowds who, during the German occupation, attended the funeral of the old poet Palamas.

We landed on the island among a group of fishermen who had come to the nonastery in order to have their boats blessed. Then we began to walk the little distance uphill to the white building of the monastery itself and the shade of the trees that stood outside it. Here we were welcomed by Sikelianos and by his beautiful wife. The poet looked older than I have seen him look before or since, yet his face lit up as he greeted us and as we exchanged the salutations “ Christ is risen,” “ Yes indeed he is risen.”

Under the trees, in the dappled shade, was a long table with plates of red Easter eggs and many other varieties of

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hors-d'oeuvre. A little distance away, over a trench filled with charcoal, the whole body of a lamb was turning on a spit. We went to examine it, to sniff the savour and to exchange greetings with the servant who was cooking it and who proudly expatiated on its excellence. The process of cooking was almost completed and we sat down in the open air to this memorable feast, memorable not only for the quantity and quality of what was eaten but for an atmosphere of dignified gaiety, of a kind of joyous calm, sympathy and affection. The sun streamed through the branches of the trees and the mild air was silent except for the tinkling of sheep bells or the occasional shouts of shepherds in the hills above us. We had come, indeed, to pay our respects to a friend and to one of the greatest poets of Europe, but there was no formality, unless the most exquisite manners can be described as formality, about our reception. Tired and ill as the poet evidently was, he was just as evidently delighted to be entertaining us. Of the conversation I can, unfortunately, remember little, since what struck me most was the kindness and distinction of the man together with the anxious attention paid to him by his wife and by those of his friends who knew him best and were, in all their gaiety, seeking to spare him any exertion that might be overtiring. I remember on this occasion, as on others, his warm smile, his grave attention to any remark that was addressed to him, the deep seriousness of his voice, particularly when he was quoting poetry, his sudden flashes of amusement. For long we sat over our meal, eating, drinking and talking. I learnt afterwards that Sikelianos was much more ill than he seemed to be. His pleasure in seeing friends and his natural delight in hospitality had constrained him to make an effort which any doctor would have discouraged. Yet his friends

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knew that he would behave as seemed to him fitting whether or not he was upon the point of death.

In the afternoon he was indeed persuaded to rest ; but when we left in the evening he was much weaker and his weakness could scarcely be disguised even by the warmth and perfection of his manners. As we crossed over the water we talked of him again, but this time with an added affection and with an acute anxiety. There were some of his friends who believed that this might be the last occasion on which they would see him, and it was clear that for them, in this event, it would be as though for some time the sun were taken from the sky.

Fortunately our apprehensions were unjustified. In a short time Sikelianos resumed his usual vigour and I have many memories more of the firm clasp of his hand and of his ringing voice. Yet still the memory of this Easter feast in Salamis is among the most endearing, since it recalls most vividly to me the affection in which he is held together with his own affectionate and noble nature.

The British Institute

OFTEN TOO when I think of Sikelianos I think of his proud leonine head and earnest demeanour as he lectured in Greek, at my request, in the hall of the British Institute in Athens. And since many of my memories are associated with this building, since indeed my connection with it was the cause of my knowing Athens at all, perhaps I may be forgiven a short passage of autobiography which will be designed partly to illustrate one aspect of Athenian life, partly to declare the circumstances and the limitations of my own knowledge.

In the summer I was offered by the British Council the post of Director of the Institute in Athens, an Institute which at this time did not exist, though the one or two Council officials on the spot were engaged, among appalling difficulties of shifting prices and changing currencies, on the task of purchasing the building and making preliminary arrangements about furniture. The offer was a surprise to me. I had been teaching at a school in London and had no particular desire to go abroad ; nor had I ever contemplated the voyage to Greece, being, like most schoolmasters, so badly paid that it would be inconceivable ever to be able to afford the fare there ; nor did it seem to me that I was qualified for the post. I had indeed once translated a play of Euripides into English and had long loved ancient Greek literature ; but I was ignorant of the modern language and, moreover, knew nothing of the

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work of the British Council. Thus it was curiosity rather than ambition which made me reply equivocally to the official who had offered me the post and decide to seek an interview with him. I shall always be grateful to this official for the way in which he dealt with my doubts and hesitations. When I asked for precise information about what exactly the job meant, I was told that I would soon find out when I got to Athens. When I admitted that I had never had any particular wish to go to Athens, my interlocutor, who had just returned from Greece, looked at me sadly (as indeed he was well justified in doing) as though I had expressed (as indeed I had) a disreputable opinion. He informed me, correctly, that it was impossible not to love the country and the people. "I can send you there now," he said, "so that you can see for yourself." (At this time military transport was more or less easily available.) "If you don't like it, there is no obligation to take the job." For some reason it seemed to me indecorous to accept this offer, to look so closely in the mouth of such a gift horse. I began to think of the sun, of photographs of the Parthenon, of a life which would at any rate be different from the life of London whether in war or peace. I therefore accepted the post at once, and it was not until the interview was over that I realized that I had asked none of the questions that I had meant to ask and that I was as ignorant as ever about what in fact I should be expected to do.

So I became Director of something I did not know and which indeed did not exist. In course of time I knew or discovered more and the institute did, in fact, come into existence. I remained its Director until the summer and was able again to visit it in . It is something for which I still feel the keenest affection, nor have I ever regretted being

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swept away by the polite enthusiasm of that British Council official who so unexpectedly and, for me, so happily offered me the post.

Now that I am no longer employed by the Council I can write about it with no restraint, and I should suggest that it is seldom given credit for an efficiency, a willingness to experiment, a tolerance and a responsibility which are seldom to be found in other organizations of the same kind. Many people's ideas of the Council seem to proceed solely from the vulgar and irresponsible attacks made upon it by a single group of newspapers. If these were to be believed, it would appear that the Council's activities were confined to teaching English country dances to displaced persons or to the holding of enormous cocktail parties. Though neither of these activities seems to me necessarily reprehensible, it is well to recognize that the Council's work is rather more broadly and intelligently based than this. Here it is not my intention to attempt to describe it, and in recalling a few of my own experiences I may indeed give the impression that our life in the Council was a gay one. It was, and why should it not be? Yet if I describe parties and extravagancies, I would ask some critics to realize that many of these parties and, I hope, most of the extravagancies were paid for out of our own pockets. I would insist too that to share our music, literature, scientific, medical and legal knowledge with an eager and an intellectual people is so far from being a "waste of taxpayers' money" as to be a most sound and solid investment. In Greece alone there are many thousands who wish to learn and to study our language. There are hundreds, and these the most influential in the country's life, who are not easily satisfied with the second rate but who constitute a ready audience for the latest and best of

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our achievements. And to attempt to meet these demands is by no means all that needs to be done. The intellectual traffic between England and those countries where the British Council operates should not be all in the same direction ; if our chief duty is to meet a local demand for knowledge about England, we are also well placed to assist in making the achievements of other countries known in England itself. In this respect the Institut Français has done invaluable work for the whole of Europe by its publication and translations of modern Greek poetry. Such activities, especially in the present state of affairs in Europe, are of the greatest value. Moreover they possess the rare distinction of being the more valuable and effective the more disinterested they are. They should never be carried out in a partisan spirit, nor should there exist anything in the nature of rivalry between our own organizations and those of other nations, such as the French and the Americans. Indeed in the mutual and friendly interest we take in the fruits of our common civilization we offer perhaps the best evidence of its value and the most likely hopes for its survival.

But I am digressing from my main theme, which is merely a building and some scenes which from time to time took place inside it.

This building is in Kolonaki Square, a quarter which journalists are fond of describing as "The Mayfair of Athens." This almost invariable description is totally misleading. In Mayfair the big houses are not interspersed with all those small butchers' shops, greengrocers, bakeries, hardware goods, cheap wine cellars, shoemakers' and leatherworkers' establishments that surround this square in Athens. True this is the quarter, on the lower slopes of Lycabettus, where many of the wealthy live ; so do many of the small tradesmen, and the

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square itself at most times of the day is filled with an assortment of people,—nursemaids and itinerant photographers, men with balloons, women with shopping baskets, priests, soldiers, taxi drivers, idlers, and officials going to and from their offices.

In the long and complicated business of getting this building furnished and equipped one came into contact with a variety of people. There was the well-dressed and cheerful contractor who liked to talk about Plato, an author whom he claimed to have studied at school and about whom he held a most original view. "It is quite true," he used to say, "that Plato is a very immoral writer, but we ought to be broadminded enough to be grateful to him for telling us of the filthy way in which people lived in those days." There were some remarkable cranks who, long before the Institute was opened, would come to propose themselves as lecturers in Geopolitics or as propagandists for their own schemes of World Government. There were generous donors of most unsightly pictures. There were almost daily changes in the rates of pay for decorators and electricians. There were all kinds of difficulties, some amusing and some exasperating. And there was an unfailing fund of excellent advice and keen enthusiasm for what we were planning from numbers of Greek friends.

So far as the complications of furnishing, hiring staff and finance went I was fortunate in having the help of colleagues who were good-humoured, able and very much more efficient than I was myself. As for the ultimate ends of this institution, I was given so much advice from so many quarters that I soon recognized the wisdom of my superior in London who had refrained from giving me any precise instructions at all. There were some who suggested that the whole thing was, anyway,

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a mistake. The building should not be there at all. It should be, if anywhere, in some less fashionable quarter of the town ; it should be furnished shoddily and decorated with statistics concerning the British steel industry or the Trade Union Movement ; the general effect should be one that combined austerity with a modified uplift. Others recommended programmes of light entertainment and the institution of tea parties in order to attract the world of fashion.

Neither of these courses was, in fact, pursued. We attempted to make the place attractive rather than demonstratively instructive ; and we took every possible step to make what we had to offer available to all sections of society. So far as politics were concerned, we avoided them. It was, indeed, a difficult period, and, in Greece, when political passions are high¹ it is not at all unusual for a grammarian, say, who has his own ideas about spelling or about accents, to be, for this reason alone, condemned by one party or another for either fascist or revolutionary tendencies. Thus there were certainly some people on the extreme right who regarded the presence of the *New Statesman* in our reading rooms as an incitement to revolt ; and on the extreme left there were others who were convinced that all our activities were a cover for some form of espionage. Only on one occasion, I think, did the chief Communist paper encourage its supporters to visit us. This was in May, when, with the support of many private collectors in Athens, we were able to hold the first exhibition of the work of the painter Theophilus, born in 1866 in Mytilene.¹ Theophilus was certainly no Marxist. Indeed his fondness for the wearing of the “ Fustanella ” and for dressing himself

¹ There is an excellent article on this painter in *Orpheus 2* (John Lehmann) by Mr. Ronald Crichton who himself organized the Exhibition to which I refer.

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up as Alexander the Great might be held to denote reactionary tendencies. Nevertheless the Communist press had rightly characterized him as "a man of the people" and as an extremely interesting "popular" artist. Thus their supporters were, I was glad to see, officially encouraged to visit the Institute, even though their newspaper warned them that the Exhibition was being held "by the wrong people, in the wrong place and in the wrong way." Some light on "the right way" to hold exhibitions was afforded by one communist visitor who demanded a cultural guide who could instruct him in the political significance of the various pictures. As might have been expected, this left wing approval, given for the wrong reasons to the right person, called forth a reaction from the right wing, who in these somewhat primitive but very expressive paintings of peasants, of heroes from the Wars of Independence, of Iphegeneia and Odysseus began to detect a style of art that, for some strange reason, reminded them of Stalin. Thus, in these circles, to be a "friend of Theophilus" was to be a dangerous and suspected person. Fortunately, the vast majority of the great numbers of people who attended this exhibition was chiefly attracted by the pictures themselves.

Generally speaking, almost any exhibition of pictures seems apt to promote controversy. Other exhibitions that we held of the work of the famous contemporary Greek painter Ghika and of the Englishman, John Craxton, who at that time was working in Greece, were no exception to this rule.

I remember many meetings with Ghika, both in the Institute and in his own beautiful house in the Plaka. I remember his meticulous attention to detail, his long and silent examinations of objects and ideas, when his face seems to express a reasoned distaste for what he is examining. Then suddenly it will light

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up in a smile of peculiar charm and brilliance, belying entirely the apparent austerity of his demeanour. This smile or laugh comes unexpectedly, like an explosion or revelation. So, I remember, once at a fancy dress party, which some of us gave, Ghika and I retired with plates of cold meat to my office so that we could eat in greater comfort. As we sat down opposite each other at my desk, Ghika removed the long drooping black moustache which had contributed greatly towards the desired appearance of a Parisian dandy of the 'nineties. He laid the moustache gravely by his plate, and the gesture, followed immediately, as it was, by his own peculiar and staccato laughter, seemed to me not only ludicrous but symbolic. Not that the grave and rigid integrity of his art and thought is at all in the nature of a disguise; but neither is it in the least forbidding. There is a warmth of impulse and enthusiasm filling out and flashing through the forms.

Not only paintings but also music and lectures would provide opportunities for interesting and various encounters. Our method, dictated partly by personal tasks and partly by what in fact was available, may sometimes have seemed like madness. One year we began our programme with a lecture on Aeschylus and ended it with performances of the native Greek form of Punch and Judy show (the Karaghioz). As I watched Greek audiences at lectures and as, afterwards, I heard their comments, I respected them more and more. They come to hear what is interesting and, if possible, new. A speaker who, while possessing all the graces, has, in fact, nothing to say will not deceive them for an instant. They will listen carefully to a close argument and will respond to a sincere feeling. They will immediately detect either looseness in the one or falsity in the other. They are critical, generous and, except

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when they are quite frankly bored, enthusiastic. They comprised, with us, all kinds of people. There would be high feathers in hats that might be associated with embassies or with "Kolonaki"; there would be open-necked shirts, dingy and bedraggled suits, bright colours and drab. Yet, except with very definite references to income or profession, it would here be inappropriate to speak of "class". In Greece money is respected as being something obviously worth having, but not as an abstraction; families are respected for their record in recent years; individuals are respected for themselves. Thus, though some sections of our audiences would certainly look down upon each other politically and, if any political address had been given, would have split into obviously antagonistic groups, there was never any opposition springing from the ideas of class or of wealth. How long so happy a state of affairs can continue anywhere in Europe, I do not know. Certainly in Greece and elsewhere there are powerful influences in support of the view that all art, literature and music have not only political importance (which is true) but also a definite political message (which, in the end, if the Gods do not forbid, may become true). Should this view prevail, it will, no doubt, become impossible for people of different political convictions to listen at the same time to the same lecturer on Shakespeare or on Aeschylus. The dead will be pressed into the service of the living and Mozart will be applauded more for his champion-ship of Figaro's legitimate conjugal rights than for the music in which the story and so much else is expressed.

In Athens at the time of which I am writing one could laugh at what often seemed the ridiculous intrusions of politics into the spheres of literature or of art. Yet now over what is geographically the greater part of Europe this intrusion is, or

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appears to be, an accepted thing. Nor, I think, can this movement, so far as the arts are concerned, be easily resisted except by claiming what will seem to politicians an extravagant freedom. Even such a slogan as "Art for Art's sake" will be found, if properly understood, to be valuable; for the obscure processes of creation can certainly not be regulated by political or moral standards. And though we must admit that the arts have their political impact, that poets really are "the unacknowledged legislators of the world," we must claim that this legislation proceeds on different principles and is, indeed, of a different order from anything done in Parliament, in committee, in any Soviet or Chamber of Deputies. And, or so it seems to me, we should urge our politicians and administrators to expect, if they expect anything, rather criticism and opposition from the arts than any obvious support or acclamation. For it is in this way, and in following their own laws that art and literature, like the disruptive criticism of Socrates, tend "to make men better."

Again I have digressed from the building which I set out to describe and which, I see now, I cannot describe adequately. For it was not so much the building—the carefully acquired chairs and carpets, the pictures, the library, the injudiciously purchased bust of Byron, the lecture rooms and all the rest—it was not all this that mattered when compared with the people who regularly or irregularly came there. It was not the building but the bright air of Athens and enthusiasm in the air that made it natural to find more friends here in a short time than one would find elsewhere in long years. Somehow we failed to quarrel or notably to disagree. Even when our Cretan door-keeper fancied himself to have been insulted by a temporary librarian and grimly resigned before Christmas, the trouble

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was soon settled in a wine shop across the way. Honour and affection were easily satisfied. Our work, I believe, was mostly pleasure ; and much of our pleasure, if strictly examined by some cultural accountant, would, I suppose, have been characterized as work, though to us it never appeared as such.



Karush das pursuing Krouchen Pishi

THEOPHILOS

Bridal Couple





Island View

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ΣΑΙΤΕΛΛΗΝ.

exp. 11.7.2000



III - Εικόνα



ESARO UCHI - Portrait of a Sailor

The Road to Eleutheræ

THOUGH so far I have only given the roughest and most general description of Athens itself, I am venturing to imagine that the reader, like the author, will not be unwilling even at this stage to go further afield. We shall never imagine anything more than a day's journey from Athens, and to Athens we shall constantly return, after a day or a day and a night. What cannot easily be conveyed in words is the joy of these returns in real life and how, whether one comes back to Athens from the Peloponnesë or the North or from the region of Marathon or Sunium, the familiar ring of mountains, the Acropolis rock and all well-known land marks seem invariably even in their familiarity surprising and so move one with that deepest and most reverent of attractions, love for what we know well and what we love the better for knowing it.

This time I shall imagine that, after Eleusis, instead of taking the left-hand fork of the road that leads to Megalo Peuko, Corinth and the Peloponnesë, we turn to the right on the main road to the north. Our destination is Delphi and we shall imagine at least one night spent there, although now, since the roads have been repaired, it is again possible to do the whole journey there and back in a single day. Such haste, however, is not to be recommended. All along the road, even in the mountains above Levadia there are small tavernas which will invite one to stop, and between the tavernas there are views of scenery so various and magnificent that, even without the

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attractions of food and drink, one will be impelled again and again to leave one's vehicle and look long at what might otherwise be a passing vision. When first I visited Delphi, on Christmas Day, the road was indeed so bad that in England great portions of it might well have been condemned as impassable ; yet one scarcely resented the fact that a journey that should have taken four or five hours took seven or eight. And now that the road is again excellent, I should advise no one to hurry over it.

From the outskirts of Eleusis, as I said before, the road forks right and crosses a wide plain where great plantations of thick and sturdy olives stand in their characteristic and varied attitudes above the red earth. Perhaps among the olives or later in the winding passes of the mountains one will come across herds of goats, animals that are a familiar feature of the Greek landscape, very various, like everything else, in appearance, and apt, like everything else, to occur suddenly and in unexpected situations. I remember a great herd of black goats standing on low rocks against the setting sun and almost in the sea near Marathon ; I remember a white lop-eared she goat in Piraeus that would run races with children who were its playmates, an animal of great grace and innocence which, for a moment unobserved, devoured our table cloth. Many of the black he-goats, with their long horns, enormous eyes and flowing beards, present an appearance which is appallingly devilish, particularly as they stand, nervous and indignant, among the loose stones and parched starry thistles along the mountain roads. Yet they differ each from each and among the fathers of the flock may be found not only frightful apparitions but also perky, suave and even endearing characters. Among the she-goats too not every one has that melting, timid and

The Road to Eleutherae

almost amorous glance. There are many whose faces and movements seem to show a wanton independence or a frigid reserve. So in Greece even the trees and the animals seem pre-eminently gifted with idiosyncrasy and peculiarity.

From this extended view of the olives and of the red earth the road ascends to the village of Mandra. Here in the narrow streets there will be old men and young boys in their grey and decorated smocks, donkeys with, in the autumn, great tins of resin slung across their backs, lorries and carts loaded with vegetables. After Mandra the road rises, descends and winds among the mountains. There are in particular two tavernas that I remember between Mandra and Eleutherae, one at the bottom, the other at the top of a hill.

The first one can be seen from some distance as the road curves in its sweeping descent, with wide views to the north and east. It is a small white place, shaded by two or three enormous trees in an otherwise treeless landscape. On a hill nearby is a small white church, and against the shining white walls of some outhouses of the taverna itself were hanging when I last visited it, in the autumn blankets that, in this wide and airy scene, caught and regaled the eye for miles. Some were magenta, or the colour of bougainvillaea, others of pale green striped with a salmon pink, others of dark green banded with a pink that, in other light, would have been outrageous. There were blue blankets also, a dark rich colour like some of the blues in the mosaics of Daphni. Two horses were grazing at the side of the white building of the taverna and we sat under the trees in an atmosphere of great calm, drinking ouzo which was served to us by a young dark-eyed girl with long plaits descending at each side of her grave inquisitive face. I have sat at this taverna often and in all kinds of weather.

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Once indeed it was so cold that one was glad to sit inside even though the room was filled with choking smoke so that one could hardly see across it to distinguish the faces of shepherds and of lorry drivers who had also come to take some refuge from the icy wind outside. I remember talking here with a Greek driver who had served with the British in Italy. For some reason the conversation turned to his own education at school. When he was small, he said, he was taught about the ancient gods. Of this mythology he only remembered that someone called Prometheus got into trouble for “flogging” fire. Of the rest of his education he was contemptuous. “The blokes,” he said, “never tell us anything useful. They only say how we were beaten by the Turks.”

But on the occasion that I am now attempting to recall the sun streamed through the leaves of the trees, and the light was dappled on the ground. It is a place of extraordinary peace and beauty, tempting one to linger and listen to the noise of bells among the hills behind and to the light breeze ruffling the leaves above.

Yet not very much further along the road, high on the summit of a hill, there is another and smaller taverna where also one will do well to stop. This one is a mere shack roofed with dried pine branches and it commands a magnificent view over miles of shadowy mountains. Here one may sit at a rough wooden table and again, perhaps, drink ouzo, the white drink tasting of absinthe that turns milky, or should do so, when it is mixed with water. With the ouzo one will be given, perhaps, tomatoes sprinkled with chopped thyme or some other herb and usually one will be alone here though the place is sometimes a resort for hunters so that there may be large or small parties of men with guns, boasting of or deplored their

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fortunes in the chase. When I was last here the place was deserted except for one man who, with his gun and belts of cartridges beside him, was making a huge meal of apples. The cap which he was wearing was covered with daisies, wild cyclamen and yellow crocuses. Indeed both in autumn and spring flowers are plentiful in the mountains. Spring no doubt is best, with the asphodel, the orchids and the brilliant anemones together with all kinds of other flowers ; but in autumn there are not only the cyclamen and the crocuses but also heather and the red and gold of vines and the shining bright yellow of the leaves of poplars.

Near this taverna, which is, I should guess, some forty or forty-five kilometres from Athens, and further along the road at a place where there is a cottage on the right with a tree that gives no shade I remember that once more we stopped our car, for we had seen lying under the shapeless tree a brown and almost shapeless mass, animate, but, because it was not expected, not immediately recognisable as a bear. This brown bear was the property and no doubt the livelihood of a small and shifty-eyed man, a Rumanian gypsy, who, with his tambourine beside him, watched with a kind of suspicious intensity by a few black-eyed and close-cropped little boys, was resting by the way side. Seeing us stop, he immediately rose to his feet and held out his tambourine for money. He never smiled, but seemed himself some wild animal, predatory and afraid, like a stoat or weasel. When we had given him some money he tugged at the bear's chain in a gesture which, mechanical and usual as it must have been with him, could not but appear to us, though we had paid for this entertainment, both savage and brutal. The great animal, panting in the heat, rolled round and stumbled with a shambling and somewhat

indecent haste, on to its hind legs. The gypsy struck his tambourine and again tugged at the chain. Now we could see that at the end of the chain was a ring piercing the bear's upper lip, which, so far from appearing like a lip at all, looked like some slit and swollen flap of flesh, hardly animal and yet somehow a centre and surrounding for pain. Indeed the eyes and ears and other features of the animal where one might have expected to find expressiveness seemed to have lost their normal functions and sensitivity was concentrated only in this unsightly, gaping, elongated and unnaturally placed wound. It was surprising and, in its own way, horrifying to see that what the bear had lost in the characteristics of bearishness it seemed to have gained in a kind of desperate humanity. That mauve lip looked like a wound in human flesh, and the hairy paws, as the animal stood upright, looked indeed like misshapen feet. From time to time renewed tuggings at the chain together with the harsh jangling of the tambourine would force the great beast into the clumsy motion that did duty for a dance. The gypsy looked, still unsmiling, now at us, now at the bear. At the corner of the cottage, dully surveying the scene, stood a donkey with a chicken perched upon its back. Shamfacedly, as though we had allowed ourselves to be introduced to some dreadful rite, we turned our backs on the scene, scarcely looking at the gypsy or at his profitable animal, somehow wishing that he and it were not present in the sunny landscape of great mountains with their sweeping declivities. So, no doubt, one averts one's eyes from much that is real and much that is symbolic of reality. The gypsy himself, perhaps, had travelled on foot in all weathers through all the mountains of the Balkan peninsular and beyond. He had escaped the gas-chambers of the Germans and the military or social demands of various state organisa-

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tions, supported and protected by this shaggy and suffering lump of flesh that was his hopeless companion. Others live by loyalty to countries, to friends, to individuals, to ideas. He was situated nowhere and free of everything except the animal to whose chain he clung. Did he, I wonder, consider us simply as the fortunate possessors of what to him would have been wealth, or as beings of a different and perhaps an inferior unknowledgeable species? I remember still his impassivity, his eyes like a viper's eyes and how, in that brilliant sun his connection with the bear seemed timeless and illiberal, something dark in all that light, yet, in all conscience, real enough.

There were four of us on this expedition, and I think we were equally affected by an emotion difficult to define and different from that which might be fostered by a society for the prevention of cruelty to animals. It was more as though a great gulf had opened before our feet.

And now the road crosses a red and brown and level plain before climbing past the ancient fortifications of Eleutherae into the range of Cithaeron and frontiers of Boeotia. Yet before continuing on our road I am tempted to digress; for, just as one approaches Eleutherae, there is another road to the left. If we were indeed going to Delphi this day, we should scarcely have time to follow it down to the sea at Aegosthena on the northern coast of the Gulf of Corinth. Yet now, or at some other time, it is worth following, and, before we imagine the crossing of Cithaeron, it may be convenient briefly to describe what would be a possible and delightful journey.

This side road ascends over rocky ground to the town or large village of Villia. I am imagining this journey as taking place in the autumn, and at this season the hillsides are glowing with the red and brown of vine leaves. Clumps of cyclamen

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will be growing along the roadside among the rocks. Peasants with their donkeys and herds of goats will be seen since Villia is a populous place. Its narrow main street is shaded with huge plane trees. The houses are colour-washed in white, pink or pale green. The tavernas on every occasion that I have stopped in or passed through the town have been filled with men engaged in deep and probably political conversation.

Villia is high up in the mountains and soon a new road, built during the occupation by the Italians, starts upon its long and sweeping descent to the sea.

Rough as it is, this descent is of extraordinary beauty. On each side are towering mountains, forests of pines that glow like emerald, olives and, in the spring, the bright blossoms of the Judas tree clinging to black trunks or springing from trailing sprays of foliage. The sea first becomes visible when still far distant, and it is not until one is already close to it that one observes among the olives to the left and below the steep road the huge walls and towers of the fortress of Aegosthena, a stronghold built in the 4th or 5th century B.C. to guard this difficult approach to Attica from the Peloponnese. As the road winds among the pines and olives and Judas trees this castle will appear again and again ; but it is suddenly that one comes upon the little seaside village with its curving beach of grey and white shingle and rock where the road itself ends.

This bay and the bay of Rhamnus in northern Attica are, to my mind, the best places in the world to bathe. The white pebbles descend steeply into clear bright water. At each side of the bay long wooded promontories stretch out into the sea, folding it in but not encircling it. On a hot afternoon one will wonder at how the pines on the left-hand side of the bay shine with a bright and sunny emerald, while on the other side there

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is a duller but a richer glow. Behind these are the great mountains appearing from here as an impassable barrier. Their peaks gleam red and white above the scattered green of trees that cling to the rocks, and their height dwarfs the few scattered houses and the small white Byzantine church along the shingle of the shore.

Here one may easily enjoy what is immediately before the eye and enjoy it so much that one will not bother to climb for a quarter of an hour or so through the olives to the walls of the ancient castle. Yet these walls and towers are indeed impressive, as are, in a different way, the remains of a Byzantine monastery, itself as impermanent and as untenanted as is the great fortification inside which it is almost lost. Olives are rooted among the massive cleanly cut stones. Bushes of rosemary grow in the more lately consecrated ground, ground indeed, which, though deserted, is not wholly forgotten; as two lamps still burn inside the small domed church that is tucked in among the splendid military ruins so excellently sited to defend this delicate coast and abrupt entry to Attica. Looking down now towards the groves of olives, the white beach and whiter church on the beach, the nets of fishermen, the few houses and the long shining promontories that clasp the brilliant blue of the bay, one seems to be, with the great mountains behind, in a private and unthreatened place, a place of peculiar and wild beauty where neither military nor religious monuments are necessary, off the beaten track, as indeed one is, in surroundings where it is not difficult to imagine the incalculable presences of the older gods.

But we have digressed from our main route and will now go back to the road we left below the other guardian fortress of Eleutherae.

The Road to Delphi

THE FORTRESS itself is on a hill to the right of the road which now ascends to the pass over Cithaeron. It appears at its most impressive when one is almost past it and can look back at the full strength of its towers and walls. Here, as at Aegosthena and as at Phyle in Parnes, is evidence of the extraordinary military power of the city state. Even now one who is particularly attached to Attica may look with reverence and a kind of anachronistic relief at this watchful and apparently impregnable fortification. For now we are leaving Attica and ascending to the high pass that overlooks the totally different scenery of the great Boeotian plain, the territory of Orchomenos and of Thebes.

It is often held that, from now on, a certain brightness has dropped from the air, that, on crossing the frontiers of Attica, one has left behind the peculiar clarity of colour and line that first astonished one in Athens itself and has remained ever since both variable and surprising. I think that there is some truth in this view, though it is difficult to see how it can be justified by the principles of optics. Not that the light here is anything but brilliant and exciting, yet still, if one can use the word of such splendour, it seems in a way, subdued. Here the eye looks over wider expanses than ever in Attica, and the great mountain ranges of Helicon and Parnassus loom up gigantic in the distance, objects more apt to excite, from here, feelings of mystery and of awe than do the mountains of

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Attica, yet, either because of their size or their distance, not so breath-taking in respect of a kind of clarity, precision and, as it were, an effortless perfection in the symmetry of line and altitude.

Yet from this mountain pass one is looking towards a plain and mountains more rich in history and legend even than Attica itself. Here, on Cithaeron, danced the Maenads who tore Pentheus limb from limb. Here the infant Oedipus was left to die, and, far in the distance, beyond Thebes, is the rock where crouched the Sphynx whose riddle he answered. Below us and this side of Thebes is the battlefield of Plataea where the last hopes of a Persian conquest of Europe were defeated. Beyond Thebes at the extremity of the great Copaic plain, once a great lake, is the site of ancient Orchomenos, like Mycenae dignified with the epithet of "golden", and powerful in remote history. And near Orchomenos is the battlefield of Chaeronea which gave the young Alexander a supreme power unheard-of previously in Europe and soon to be exercised throughout Egypt, Asia, Mesopotamia and India. Then there is Thebes itself, the foundation of Cadmus, whose inhabitants sprung from the teeth of the dragon that Cadmus slew, the scene of the tragedies of Semele, Actaeon, Pentheus and so many more of the hero's descendants that he and his wife, Harmonia the daughter of Aphrodite, were glad enough in extreme old age to be turned by the gods into gentle snakes. Later the walls rose to the music of Amphion's lyre, yet prosperity turned the head of Niobe, Amphion's wife. Laius was killed by his son Oedipus at the meeting of the roads near Delphi, and, after the tragedy of Oedipus himself came the tragedies of his children Polynices, Eteocles and Antigone. And not only has Thebes provided the material for so much

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legend and so many tragedies ; it has also been the home of the earliest and some of the greatest of the Greek poets of the mainland. Even when, after Chaeronea Alexander destroyed the whole city, he left the house of Pindar as a monument to the poetical past. And finally in the distance beyond the plain is the very haunt of the Muses, Parnassus itself, more sacred even than Olympus or Dodona.

All this and much more of history and imagination are connected with the view that meets the eye as one descends from Cithaeron and begins the long crossing of the plain in the direction of Levadia. There is brown earth, red rocks in the mountains and at first some rising and falling of the ground. After Thebes the country is flatter and more intensively cultivated, though even before Thebes there are great fields of cotton and other crops of a size never found in Attica. *

It must be owned that Thebes itself has today little about it that can recall its splendid past. The ancient citadel appears both small and shabby. Little remains of the mediaeval buildings where the Dukes of Athens held their courts. The modern town lacks all distinction.

It is, to my mind, only when Thebes is left behind that the country again begins to be invested with a really remarkable beauty. As one descends from rising ground into the wide Copaic plain where, in spring and summer, storks will be standing in the fields or flapping among the villages, it seems somehow that the transition from Attica has really been accomplished, so that one can enjoy what one sees without consciously or unconsciously comparing it with what is on the other side of the mountains. Now the whole plain, from the ragged peaks of Helicon on the left past the mountains streaked heavily with red to the right of Levadia and away to

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the hills in the direction of Chalcis, seems a great sea swimming in light and rimmed with red or golden hills.

So, over these cultivated levels, we draw nearer to the great mountains of Phocis. The town of Levadia is built at the entrance of the gorge at the extremity of the plain, and it is at this point that we leave the main road to the north and begin to climb in the direction of the towering peaks of rocky Parnassus.

Levadia itself is a pleasant enough place. There are shops bright with the colours of rugs and carpets made high up in the mountains of Arachova. On my last visit here in there was good wine and good food to be had in a taverna in the busy central square. I remember that neither the one nor the other was available, when I first came to Levadia on Christmas Day.

At that time the effects of UNNRA and other forms of relief were only beginning to be felt. When one went outside Athens one would take with one bread, tinned food and other rations. If one was lucky enough to find food in any restaurant or hotel these rations would always be welcome as gifts or useful as barter. On the occasion that I remember in

there seemed to be no food and little life at all in Lavadia. We sat at a solitary table in the deserted square eating the bread and tinned meat that we had brought with us and drinking from our own supply o' whisky. The one waiter who appeared could provide us only with water and with coffee. Now, in spite of the renewal of the civil war and the presence, until quite recently, of formidable bands of rebels in Parnassus, the scene is very different. The town is alive and appears to be prosperous. How far this prosperity is real and not merely apparent I am not prepared to say, being well aware that such appearances are often deceptive and that, for example, the

mere presence of goods in shop windows may be a sign either of affluence or of general poverty.

Before leaving Levadia one should go a very little distance off the way and visit the great gorge with springs that gush from the rock and are the fountains of Lethe and Mnemosyne. Above them is the cavern where was once the oracle of Trophonius, son of the King of Orchomenos, who is said to have built the first temple to Apollo at Delphi. The replies given by this famous oracle in ancient times seem always to have been of a depressing kind, since it was a common saying of anyone who appeared to look particularly dejected that "he must have consulted the oracle of Trophonius." To-day, however, there is nothing in this gorge to make one dispirited.

And now the road climbs into mountain scenery of immense magnificence. Sometimes there is a kind of wild grandeur in the sheer walls of rock and the deep valleys below the winding road ; sometimes the view opens out upon coloured and sunny hillsides ; there is heather, dark red and gold of vines and, I remember well last autumn, in the afternoon sun, the fantastical ghostly shapes of poplars with their pale gold shimmering leaves, a sight so beautiful among the richer more solid colour of the vines that over and over again we stopped to admire particular glades and hollows in the mountains, where, flaming against distant shadows, these tall, brilliant, and seemingly insubstantial trees stood. To the right would be the gleaming peaks of Parnassus and to the left the dark forests of a more level ridge. Still the road climbs and winds through changing views. There is one junction of roads in the high mountains, the place where the young Oedipus, on his way from Delphi, became involved in a quarrel with the attendants of an old man travelling in a chariot

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and thus unknowingly killed his father. Here, if we are on our way to Delphi, we go to the right ; but the left-hand road would take us to another religious place, the monastery of Osios Loukas, one of the greatest Byzantine buildings in Greece, set in the wildest scenery, with mosaics comparable with those of Daphni.

But for the moment we have digressed enough and so I shall imagine that we keep to the right-hand way. Still the road ascends and still we seem to be coming closer to that great mountain of Parnassus which, sometimes visible, sometimes hidden, has been our destination, seen or imagined, since we crossed the pass over Cithaeron. Now the road seems to have pierced the thickest barrier of mountain and, rounding a bend, we see hanging over a steep gorge the village of Arachova, the tower of its church, and the roofs rising and descending on the precipitous site. It is a village famous for its brightly coloured carpets, its red wine and the beauty of its inhabitants. It has suffered both during the war and during the civil war, as is easily to be seen from boarded-up windows and barred houses and, or so it seemed to me after a very superficial examination, from the faces of the people.

From this high place in the mountains the road descends for a few miles to Delphi itself. Already, when just past Arachova, one will perhaps stop and look down to the left, over the white curves of the road below and the steep declivity, to the deep shade of that long valley through which pours like a river to Delphi and the sea a long continuous forest of olives.

Lower down a cliff juts out into what is now more like a gorge than a valley. Against this cliff is the white building of the museum which, one hopes, by the course of time and

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weather may in the end be less noticeable than it now is. Round this cliff the road sweeps in a short ascent and one is in Delphi itself. There is a short street with an hotel and two tavernas, some small houses set one above the other on the steep hill. That, at first and for the moment, seems to be all ; for it is not immediately that one is able to adjust one's eyes to the wider surroundings of almost appalling grandeur and holiness here, at the navel of the world.

Soon, whether from some place beyond the houses or from one of the balconies of the hotel, one will be looking downwards and along the gorge above which the little town clings to the side of mountains some 2,000 feet above the sea. Far below is the widening stream of olives flowing down to the shining water of the Gulf of Corinth. To the right a tongue of land, like a steep promontory, juts out into the plain, separating this flow of olives from what appears like another flood of the same trees coming down into the sea from the neighbourhood of Amphissa. In front, on the other side of the gorge, mountains rise perpendicularly to the sky and, in the great gulf before one's eyes, one may see, perhaps, eagles flying below one. These birds of Zeus are nearly always visible here, either below the level where one stands or far above it, circling the peaks behind the sanctuary or over the cleft in the hills from which rises the Castalian fountain.

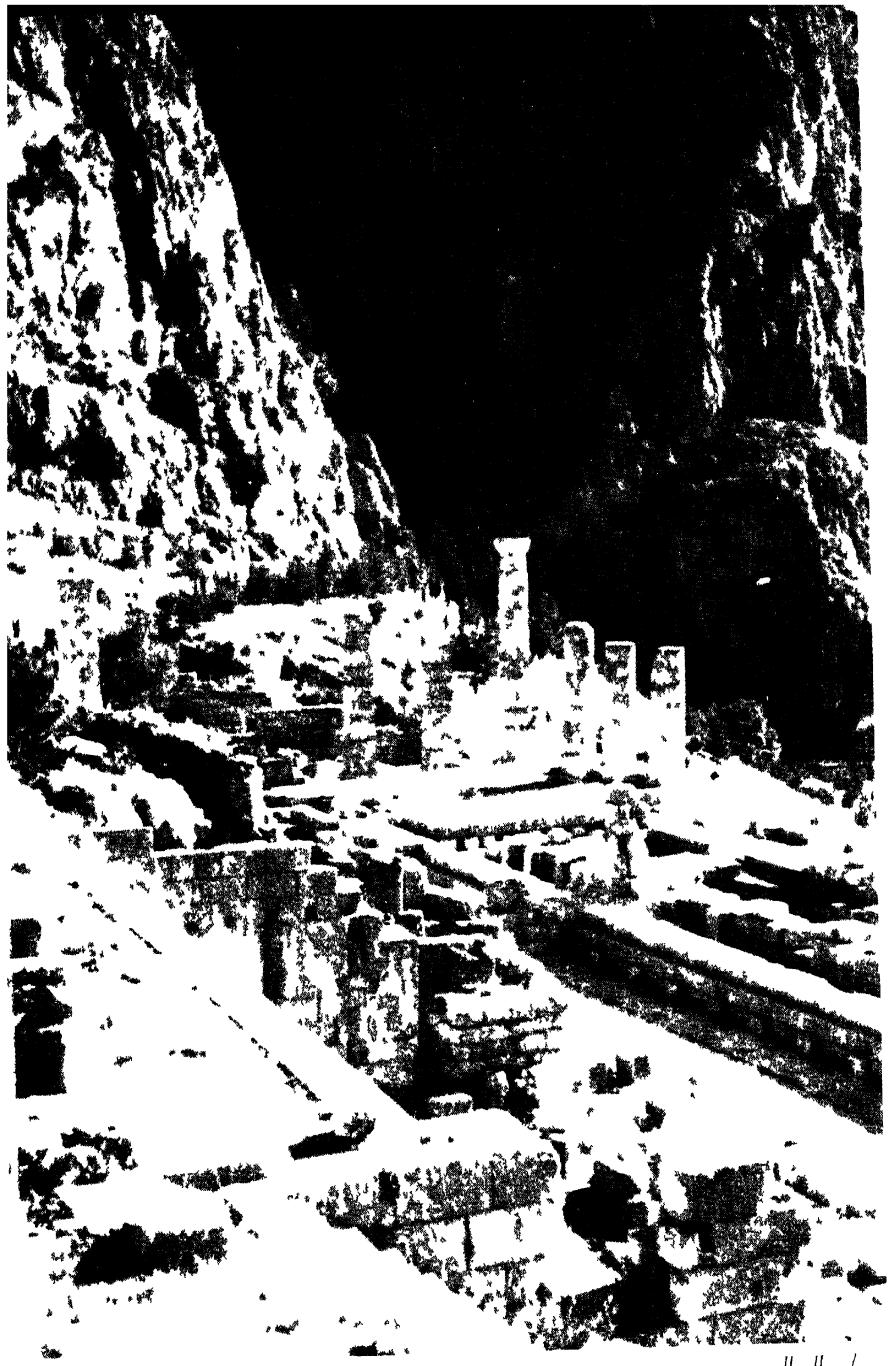
And now, if the light holds, one will visit the sacred place itself. It is perhaps easiest to walk back along the road to the museum and from near here to climb the Sacred Way to the temple of Apollo. If, however, it is already not far from sunset, it may be advisable to climb directly to the higher ground above the Stadium which is situated higher up than the temple, and the theatre. One will then ascend steeply through the



Farronus from the road to Delphi

Old man in Delphi





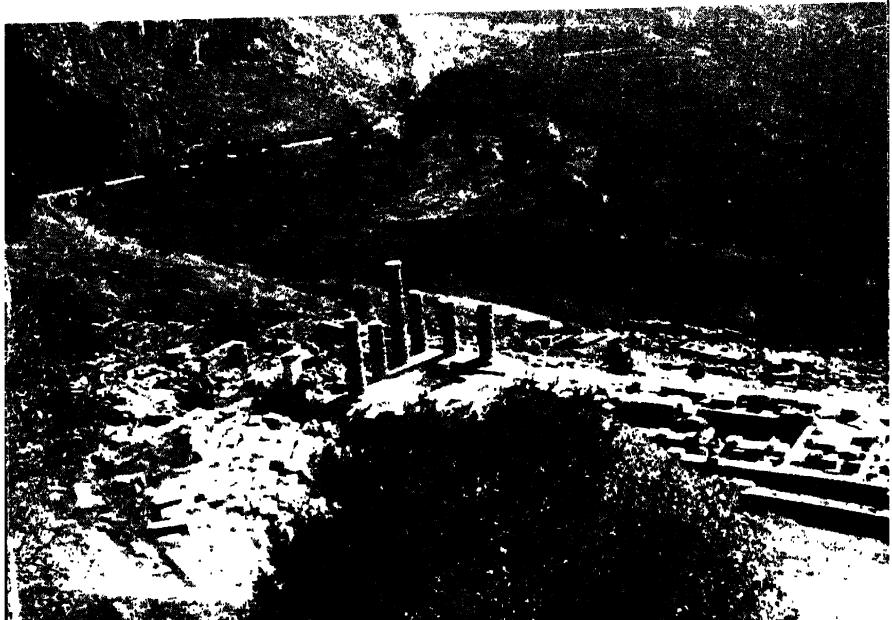
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Delphi

John Lehmann





Delphi: The Gymnasium



Delphi

John Rivett

The Road to Delphi

village itself, bearing always to the right, stumbling over rough ground and walls built to preserve the sparse soil from being washed away entirely from the roots of olives. So one will come to a position rather above the Stadium and, looking south and west, will see the distant mountains of the Peloponnese, peak after peak, radiant in the setting sun. When first I saw this view it was in winter and it was only at this hour that the red sun pierced through the low clouds which turned to purple and to amethyst. Above them were the great snowy summits of the mountains and below, dark and shadowy, remote from this height, though much nearer than the hills, was still that slow cataract of olives filling the ground before the sea. There is no place that I know where are combined so powerfully impressions of space, height and depth. Yet here we are still only on the outskirts of the holy place.

Suppose now that we turn further to the right and, descending a little by rough paths, come to the Stadium whose long grassy space is, in spring and summer, covered with all kinds of flowers. Now we are in that hollow of the mountains which holds what remains of what was once the richest, the holiest and the most powerful of religious foundations. Behind, the two high sheer cliffs of the Phaidriades pierce and shut in the sky. In front is the steep mountain beyond the gorge. It is, I think, quite impossible to convey in words any adequate impression of the sublimity and, as it were, the divinity of a scene in which, if one's mind is not moved by a kind of reverence, one may well feel spiritually rather overpowered than elevated. There are many good geographical reasons why, because of its position on various routes by land and sea, Delphi, though unimportant as a power, should have acquired its peculiar importance as a centre for Hellenic religion. More

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satisfactory than any of these reasons seems to me the character of the place itself ; and yet this explanation too, geographical in a different way, hardly seems to account for everything in the atmosphere. There are many places in Greece, and here perhaps most of all, where one is tempted to wonder whether our rationalistic approach to the past may not be something fundamentally childish, inhibited or purblind. In such places one is aware of existences that are not recognised by our philosophies, and, even if one imagines, in quasi-scientific terms, the possibility of the past, by some trick of time's dimensions, being incorporated with the present, even if, more spiritualistically, one conceives of the real though unseen presence of innumerable ghosts and an infinity of thought, one is conscious that these terms also are not appropriate, though they may tend in a more accurate direction than mere materialism, for the expression of the real, pervading and immensely powerful genius of the place.

Not even the history of the ancient oracle can be readily explained by "scientific" theory. We do not know by what processes, physical or spiritual, the Pythia became inspired ; and, though many of the replies given can be explained away by the assumption of a skilful intelligence service among the priests combined with a fairly far-sighted, though often mistaken, foreign policy, there are other replies which do not seem susceptible of such explanations. Why, for instance, and on what motives of policy should the unknown Athenian, Socrates, have been pronounced the wisest of men ? Why should such careful attention have been given to particular and private problems ? Here, as at Eleusis, it seems to me that we have to acknowledge our ignorance of forces which were once, and may always be, powerful. And here, more than any-

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where, one is conscious of their power, however ignorant of the forms in which this power was expressed.

Thus I shall not write here of the theatre, of the remains of the great temp^{le} and the treasuries below, or the group of buildings among the olives on the further side of the road. Some of these remains are splendid enough and, though all the very greatest trophies of the past have been scattered, there is still much in the museum that will repay attention. Yet it is the place itself, with the eagles and the mountains, that remains fixed in the memory, whether seen at dusk or in the bright sunshine, with qualities altogether pre-eminent and not, I think, communicable in words.

A Political Party

IN RECENT YEARS it has not always been easy or even possible to reach Delphi from Athens. The mountain roads have been mined and there have been sudden raids by rebel bands on Delphi itself and on Arachova. Here, as in the mountains of the Peloponnese and of Northern Greece, families have been torn apart and irreconcilable feuds exist.

When, on Christmas Day, Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden dramatically flew to Athens, which at the time was almost entirely in the hands of the revolutionary army of ELAS, they hoped, no doubt, to bring the civil war to an end by peaceable agreement. Their efforts, however, failed, except in so far as their intervention may have succeeded in gaining valuable time for the reinforcement of the British troops then in Athens. There was not much peace or good will in Greece that Christmas, and, two days after Christmas, Piraeus and the whole southern half of the city was the scene of bitter fighting. It was not till January 11th that ELAS made overtures for an armistice and not till a month later that the final, or supposedly final, agreement was reached at Varkiza.

The appointment of Archbishop Damaskinos as Regent together with the atrocities committed by ELAS in Athens had had the result of alienating moderate opinion from the left-wing party of EAM (whose fighting organisation is known by the initials ELAS). In accordance with the terms of the Varkiza Agreement great numbers of arms were given up

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and great numbers of guerilla troops returned to their own parts of the country. So far as Athens was concerned, the actual fighting was over, and for some time it was hoped that the rest of the country also might enjoy peace and move in the direction of unity. For some months, indeed, there was an uneasy truce, though at all times the utmost verbal violence was employed. But it was not long before, under a more rigidly Communist leadership and with the support of the Communist Governments of neighbouring states, organised hostilities were resumed and large areas of the country were again plunged into that atmosphere of terror and misery from which they had only momentarily and precariously escaped. By the autumn after an immense expenditure of effort by the Greek army, once more the rebels acknowledged defeat. It is too soon to be able to state with any confidence whether this defeat is final or whether the northern neighbours of Greece have any intention of refraining from supporting and building up the remains of the rebel army.

It was in Delphi, during a period of comparative peace, on Christmas Day, a year after the fighting in Athens, that I joined in an uproarious and hard-drinking party of local Andartes (or guerilla fighters), and I have often wondered how many and which ones of that agreeable band have been involved, willingly or unwillingly, in the subsequent destruction of so much life, wealth, confidence and security in Greece.

At that time I was travelling with a friend who spoke Greek much better than I did and who had had, during the war and after, much experience in the islands and on the mainland of the Andartes, whom he had himself commanded with distinction and success on many occasions.

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When we came out into the street at night from the small room where we had managed to secure beds, we were attracted by the noise from one of the tavernas over the way. Carrying with us the remains of our bottle of whisky, bread and various tins, we went to enquire what, if anything, there was to be had locally. We were very lucky. What the food was I do not remember, but imagine that it was plentiful. The wine was both plentiful and good. A large cask of it stood in one corner of the room and throughout the evening our glasses were constantly being replenished. Already the room was fairly full and, as time went on, it became fuller. Evidently this was the scene of some sort of celebration and it soon became clear that the principal participants were members of guerilla bands who had fought against the Germans and, later, against us and their own countrymen.

Though my friend was wearing uniform and though, for all they knew, he and I might have been engaged in the offensive of the previous December which drove ELAS out of Athens, they made us welcome and several of them came to sit at our table. I remember in particular one young man of about twenty-five and an older smaller man with a drooping moustache and quick intelligent eyes. Both had taken part in the march on Athens, and in the subsequent retreat. Their attitude to us was from the first one of friendly interest. This was before the days when B.B.C. correspondents and others were taken prisoner by the rebels, nor were these people, I think, interested in securing publicity for themselves. They were animated partly by a love of displaying hospitality, partly by curiosity as to our political views,—both normal characteristics of the Greeks. Thus, after a few glasses of wine, we were soon engaged in a political discussion. What, they asked,

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did we think of Churchill? Was it not clear that the British people had repudiated him because of his intervention in Greek affairs? We pointed out that almost the whole of the British people had the greatest admiration for Churchill's conduct of the war and that in voting for Labour at the election they had certainly not intended anything in the nature of a vote of censure on one who was still a national hero. To this argument our friends listened with interest and some slight disappointment. On the whole, I think, they believed what we said, but regarded it as evidence of political immaturity among our countrymen. Next they asked us what we thought of Mr. Attlee. Was he deliberately deceiving the working class? We said that we were quite certain that he was doing nothing of the kind and that, whether one agreed with his policy or not, there was no doubt of his sincerity in putting it forward. At this point the young man expressed surprise that we should on the whole approve of both of the leaders of the great parties. And indeed it may have been true that our attitude was too irritatingly correct as officials of the British Council. He certainly would have wished us either to exalt or to execrate one or other of these statesmen. The older man, however, seemed to find our answers reasonable. "There is no difference," he pronounced, "between Churchill and Attlee. There is only one man in your Labour Party who understands what socialism is."

He paused, waiting for us to suggest names. We put forward the name of Mr. Harry Pollitt. The man with the moustache shook his head and launched forth upon what seemed to us a very accurate and fair account of the weaknesses of the British Communist party. How and where among these wild hills he had acquired this knowledge remains a mystery.

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After hazarding several other unsuccessful guesses at the identity of our one great authority on socialism, we gave up. Our friend refilled our glasses and told us, with amusement and also a kind of perplexity at our ignorance, that the name for which we had been groping was that of Professor Laski. Whether or not the Professor had recently made some pronouncement on Greece I do not know ; but I fancy that, even though he might not have approved of the processes of thought involved, he would have been glad to find his reputation as a political theorist standing so high among these mountain warriors, so different in so many respects from his own students.

Afterwards we talked about the war against the Germans and about the civil war. We argued about the rights and wrongs of the British intervention and what was striking about this argument was that, though it was excited, it was not bitter. For the British troops who had driven ELAS out of Athens these opponents of theirs either felt or, at any rate, expressed no hatred. It seemed to them then and in this place to have been something unfortunate from their point of view, and a mistake from a general point of view, yet something to be taken not as an irreparable disaster but rather as, in a way, part of the day's work. Of all Greek politicians except their own leaders they spoke with the greatest contempt and seemed certain that before long their own party would inevitably regain power, either as a result of an election (this was before the Communist leadership of their party, realising the improbability of such a result, had instructed its followers to abstain from voting) or by some other means which might involve a little, but not much, fighting.

When we pointed out that the atrocities in Athens had

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forfeited them much of the support which they used to have in the capital, it was evident that we had embarked on a subject on which they felt deeply. It was true, they admitted, that atrocities had taken place, but this was the work of the irresponsible refugee population of Athens itself. It was the people from Smyrna, not the Andartes, who had committed these crimes ; and they told story after story to illustrate the discipline and the justice which had characterised the operations of their own band.

By now there was music, singing and dancing in the room. In the centre five or six men, with hands linked together, were slowly circling, while the dancer at the end of the line, with a high-held handkerchief connecting his hand with that of the man next to him, was executing lightly and nimbly, in spite of his heavy boots, those intricate steps interspersed with high leaps into the air that are a feature of the wilder Greek dancing and are accompanied not only by the noise of singing and of clapping hands but the closest and most critical attention from the eyes of the audience. Not only correctness but a kind of individuality is expected from the dancer, who, whatever his state of sobriety or inebriation, will devote himself to his art, when he is in the leading position of the dance, with a concentration that is as great as that of an opening batsman taking the first over in a Test match.

In the dancer whom we were now watching there was not only this normal and exact concentration, but also a kind of light-hearted bravado. If one may return to metaphors drawn from cricket, his performance might remind one more of Charlie Barnett than of Hutton. He was unlike either of these great cricketers in appearance, being stocky, rather fat, middle aged, with powerful hands, and, in spite of the gaiety of his

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face and of his gestures, of a distinctly authoritative, though genial, bearing. He was pointed out to us as being or as having been, a famous Kapetanios, or leader of a guerilla band. We were informed of his exploits, of his generosity to the poor, his justice and his sense of humour. It might have been of Robin Hood that we were hearing, and I should imagine that what we heard was true. Many of these bands had exemplary records not only of daring, but of a kind of 'hivalry. There were others whose proceedings were characterized by appalling savagery. Nor were the differences between them the result of a greater or less degree of political indoctrination. It was much more a question of personalities, and in Greece, I should imagine, it was only gradually that members of these so-called "democratic" forces began to notice the real pervading presence behind the scenes of a machine which, finally, attached little value to personalities or to aspirations that could not be readily employed towards ends of its own.

As we watched the dancing a very differently dressed group of people came into the room and were welcomed enthusiastically by the others. The newcomers wore high-necked polo jerseys or lounge suits. Two women accompanied them. We assumed, without any evidence, that this comparatively well-dressed party constituted the theoretical leadership of the movement. We alluded to them between ourselves as "the Left Book Club", and amusing ourselves with conjectures, decided that the two girls were economists of the London school, that the tall young man in a green sweater was the organizer of a subversive movement among boy scouts, and that a rather thin pasty-faced and severe young man with spectacles was destined to be Minister of Information when his party came into power. Before long most of the Left Book

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Club had joined the dancing in the middle of the floor. We commented on them somewhat unkindly. The two girls appeared to be dancing with a meticulous care as though this exercise was a national duty to be conscientiously performed. The scouimaster shouted a great deal and kept on bringing new people into the dance. He never himself occupied the position of prominence at the end of the line, and we came to the conclusion that he was simply a Sports Organiser, himself ignorant of all games. As for the Minister of Information, he sat at his table with his head bowed on his hands. We regarded him contemptuously as an intellectual too high-brow, or too ~~lazy~~ to be interested in the amusements of the people.

What, then, was our amazement when, after one dance had ended and the middle space of the floor was free, this man whom we had imagined as so unathletic and morose suddenly threw off his coat and, to the accompaniment of cheers and laughter, began to execute a pas seul somewhat in the manner of a Scottish reel, but demanding an even greater energy and agility for its performance. Indeed it seemed that in all senses of the phrase the Minister of Information would bring the house down, as he bounded into the air, flinging his arms sideways, upwards and downwards, stamped majestically on the floor or, in lighter rhythms, intricately directed the movements of his feet. Never, not even among the sailors of Piraeus, have I seen such dancing. Our feelings for the Minister changed immediately into respectful admiration and we began to look even upon the economists and the Sports Organiser with different eyes.

So much of the night was spent in singing, dancing and conversation. The Left Book Club, though scrupulously polite, were somewhat distant in their attitude to my friend and

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myself. The more proletarian members of the party became more and more friendly, hospitable and curious. Before the end of the evening we seemed somehow to have reached a general agreement on nearly all subjects. Justice should again return to earth ; her arrival should be marred by no acts of brutality or of violence ; the countryside should be tranquil, the towns prosperous and industrious. There should be a lasting alliance between England and Greece, directed against no one, though a watchful eye might perhaps be kept upon the Germans and Bulgarians. The great peoples of Russia and America, hating, as they did, the idea of war, would vie with each other simply in securing a higher standard of life and a richer culture.

So we amused ourselves with dreams which (such was the effect of the wine and of our friendly feelings) did not appear altogether idle. Next evening, on our way back to Athens, our car broke down in the neighbourhood of Thebes and we spent the night in that unprepossessing town. Here we were entertained by some young officers of the Greek army. They too were charming ; they too believed in the regeneration of Greece. Had they and our friends from Delphi met together in the same room and in the right circumstances, it is possible that amity might have prevailed between them. In fact they were more likely, in the name of various abstractions and in an atmosphere of mutual misunderstanding, to be shooting each other from the cover of rocks in the mountains.

The Road to Mycenaean

SO FAR all our imaginary excursions from Athens have been made, except for a passing reference to Liopesi, by the road that goes out of the city in the direction of Eleusis. And now, before attempting to describe some parts of northern and eastern Attica, it may be convenient to imagine one more excursion along this road, this time past Salamis and past Corinth to the Peloponnese. To go from Athens to Nauplia is now an easy journey, whether by road or train. On the way one may stop at, among many other places, Corinth, Mycenae, Tiryns and Argos. From Nauplia itself it is not difficult to reach Epidaurus. One night (and preferably two nights) will have to be spent away from Athens if one is to undertake this expedition.

I shall imagine again that we are travelling by road, though in fact it is by no means necessary or even more comfortable to do so. The train known as the Automotrice will provide one with as good views as can be had from the road and is in every way to be recommended. As, however, I shall imagine more frequent stops than any traveller by train would be likely to make, I shall assume that we are still lucky enough to have our own transport.

So again we pass Daphni and Eleusis, after which we turn to the left away from the road to Thebes and the north. Again we follow the sea coast to Megalo Peuko and seven kilometres further on we come to the city of Megara with its white

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houses covering the two rounded low hills which were the ancient citadels of the place. It may be the shape of these hills which makes the town appear from a distance somewhat oriental.

It was this city which in the 7th and 8th centuries B.C. colonized Sicily and founded Byzantium itself. Later its reluctance to be incorporated in the Athenian empire was one of the main causes of the Peloponnesian War. To-day the mean houses, the squares, and the cafés scarcely reflect the glories of the past, but the Megarians themselves, now largely of Albanian stock, claim a pre-eminence for the beauty of their women. Their dancers are particularly celebrated. On Easter Monday the square will be full of gorgeous costumes, yellow handkerchiefs bound around black hair, long lines of dancers swaying in the open place to the traditional tunes and surrounded by great crowds of appreciative critics who have come from Athens and from all sides to see this famous annual performance. Here too on Sunday evenings there seems to be a regular parade of youth. The road out of the city is packed with bands of girls and young men, and, as one moves slowly through them, one will often approve their reputation for beauty. The Athenian poets were fond of attributing to their nearest neighbours, the Megarians and the Boeotians, an abysmal stupidity. In Megara I have only come across one example of this. It was a Greek-American hotel keeper who spoke longingly of a slum in Pittsburgh and would have willingly exchanged all the beauties and amenities of his own country for a few of the modern conveniences there available. It was true that in these his own hotel was totally lacking.

Beyond Megara both road and railway skirt the coast of the Saronic Gulf. Below are sheer descents into the sea and above

The Road to Mycenae

are the precipices of the high Scironian rocks. This is the path that the young Theseus travelled from Troizen to Athens and from these rocks he hurled the robber Sciron into the sea. And, over the waters of the bay, on the Peloponnesian shore, his innocent son Hippolytus was destroyed by his father's curse, when a great wave, at the bidding of Poseidon, cast up a monstrous bull before the young man's team of chariot horses, terrifying the animals so that they ran away with their master and dashed him to death upon the rocks.

After the mountains comes the sandy plain of the Isthmus of Corinth. Already in the distance will be visible the great hill of Acrocorinth, appearing from here to dominate the two seas, with the lines of walls, Turkish, Frankish and Venetian, winding about its broad precipitous face. Past the station of Loutraki, over dull and sandy ground, one comes to the bridge over the Corinth canal, now at last open to shipping, after having been blocked for some time by demolitions. The idea of making this canal was a very ancient one. The tyrant Periander of Corinth is assumed to have planned the project in the 6th century B.C. Much later the emperor Nero inaugurated the work himself with a golden spade. There was a labour force of 6,000 Jewish prisoners sent to the emperor from Palestine by Vespasian, who just previously during the Greek tour had offended his royal master, whose throne he was shortly to occupy, by falling asleep during a recitation of his poems. It is said that the plans made by Nero's engineers were well laid, but the work was interrupted owing to the disturbed state of the empire and it was not till 1893 that the canal, so long in the minds of monarchs and of engineers, was actually constructed.

The Isthmus is barren, windy and desolate. It is not till one is nearly in the modern town of Corinth that one can look over

Views of Attica

the rising ground to the mountains of the northern shore of the gulf, towards Helicon, Parnassus and beyond. Indeed it is from the air that the gulf of Corinth can be best seen, with, on the one hand, the great mountains of Phocis and Boeotia, and, on the other, the Peloponnesian heights of Kyllene and Erymanthus.

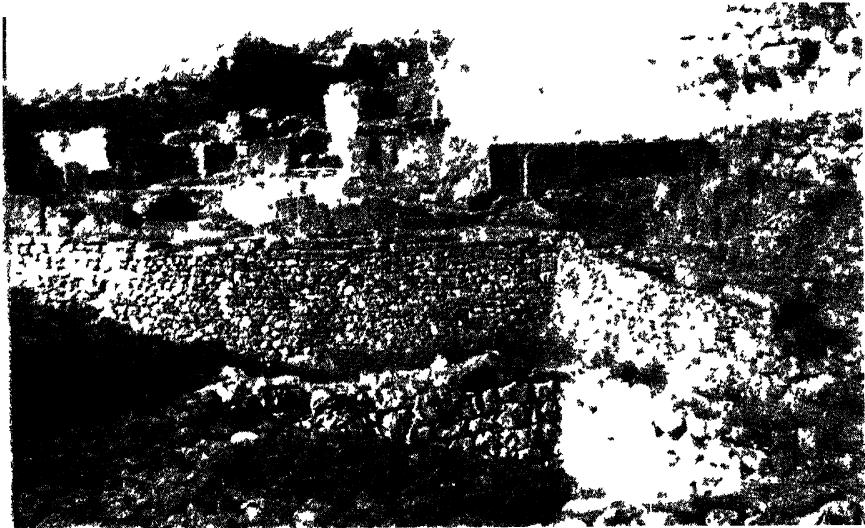
The modern city of Corinth is at the Peloponnesian end of the Isthmus. It was rebuilt after the earthquake of 1928 and is totally lacking in any architectural beauty. Indeed the whole town gives one the impression that another tremor of the earth, however slight, would immediately result in a general collapse.

Beyond Corinth and to the right of the main road the ruins of the ancient town lie beneath the steep crags of the citadel. It is not a place that has ever greatly attracted me and I must forbear from describing what, indeed, I find difficult to remember. To my mind time spent among these fallen columns is wasted if it deters one from making the ascent of Acrocorinth itself. All the way up this great hill open out enormous views of sea and mountain. The ground by the side of the path will be, in spring time, bright with flowers, and at this season of the year the keen air from the distant snowy peaks and ridges will invigorate one even on the steep ascent and even in the hot sun. The fortifications together with the nature of the place make this seem an impregnable citadel, although in fact it was frequently taken either by superior skill in the attacking forces or as the result of treachery among the defenders. From the very summit one can look back over familiar ground. There in the distance is the conical shape of Aegina; Salamis and the mainland seem merged together, but beyond them are the mountains of Athens, and Sunium at the end of the Saronic gulf.



John Lehman

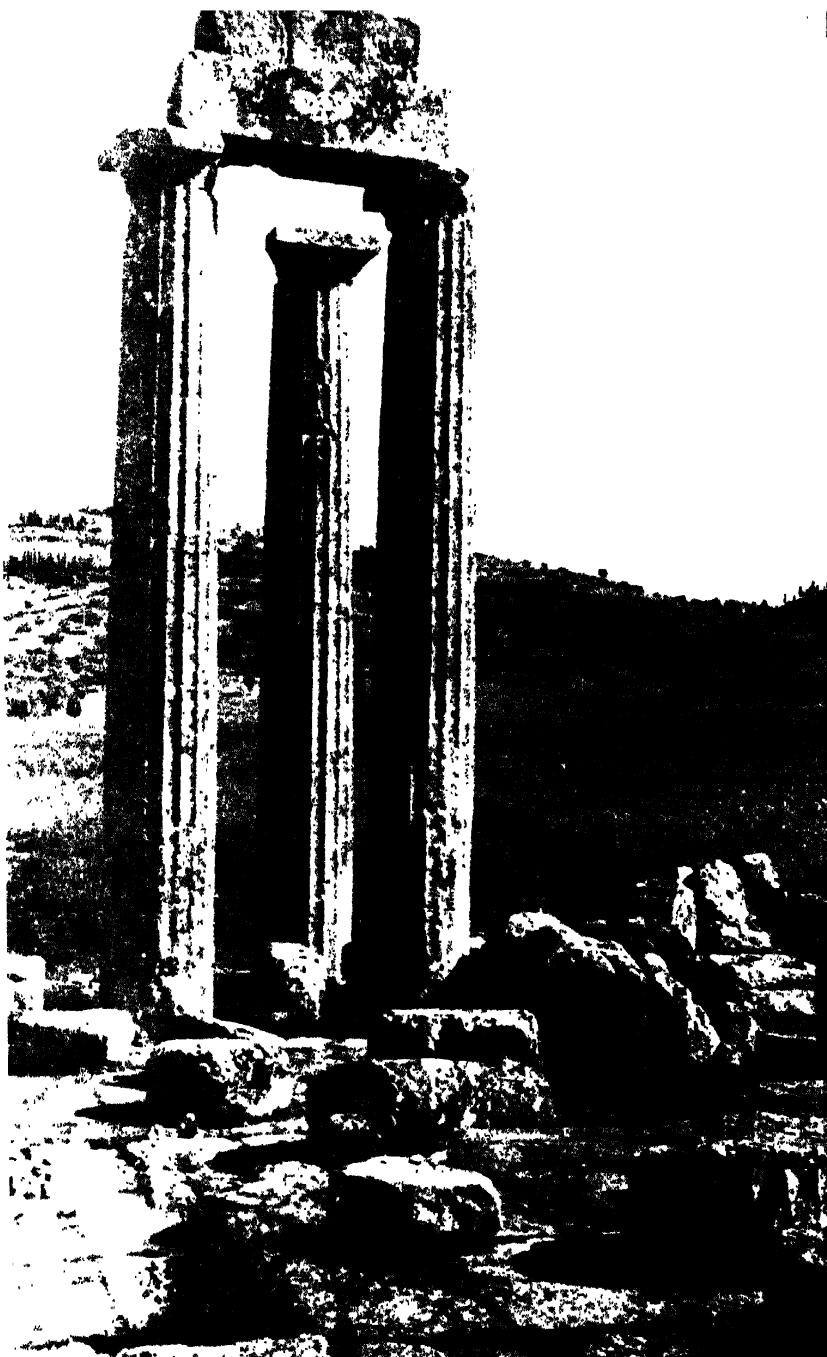
Mycenae



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Nemea



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Nemea

The Road to Mycenae

After Acrocorinth both road and railway enter the mountains of the Argolid and, it is not until we emerge into the southern plain of Argos that the sea becomes visible again. This mountain scenery is different again from that of Attica, or of the Megarid or of Phocis. Here the grey hills, with their streaks of red, seem rather tumbled together than architecturally planned. There are long slopes too and extended valleys, fields of asphodel in the spring, oleanders growing along the water courses. And in winter also this scenery is peculiarly impressive with the ghostly shapes, like petrified smoke, of sig trees against the bare rock and the stiff black lines of cypresses. It is wild country indeed that lies between the arid isthmus and the fertile plain of Argos and seems a likely enough place for the various labours of Hercules which are associated with this part of the Peloponnese.

The scene of the first of these labours lies only a little distance off the main road to Mycenae. Thirty kilometres or so from Corinth at a pass in the mountains a rough track goes off to the right to Nemea, where Hercules killed the famous lion and where every two years were held the Panhellenic Nemean games. Tempted though one may be to go straight on to Mycenae and to avoid a piece of road which is in singularly bad repair, one should not be deterred from visiting this valley, particularly if one is travelling in autumn. Then the valley and its surrounding hills are covered in the red and gold of vines. It is an open extended view with trees in the middle distance and far away a great flat-topped hill. Among the red and yellow of the vines are black cypresses starting from the grey of hillsides, and, in the valley, stand the three remaining upright columns of the templ^o of Zeus with all round them the ruins of the great building. The mellow colour of the stone, the

Views of Attica

calm shallow valley among the vines leave on the mind not an impression of desolation or of the violence of the earthquake in which the temple was destroyed but rather a feeling of calm and peace, a fascinated drowsiness, something wholly different from the feelings provoked by the landscape through which one has come or likely to be provoked by the more famous and spectacular views from the citadel of Mycenae.

And now, having rejoined the main road, one descends through rocky defiles to the plain of Argos. To the left are the grey rounded summits of forbidding mountains. Among these, on a day of August in 1822, a Greek force commanded by Kolokotronis ambushed a large army of Turks, killing 3,000 of them. And in remote history this passage from the southward-looking plain to the north was guarded by legendary and real kings, queens and heroes,—Perseus, Thystes, Atreus, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Orestes.

By the time that one reaches Mycenae the plain has already begun to open out. From the railway station and from the place where one turns left from the main road, the mountains amongst which one knows that the famous citadel is situated do not appear in themselves particularly remarkable, nor can even a practised eye discover from a distance the whereabouts among these folded hills of the known site. A mile or two up the shaded road from the plain is the village of Mycenae with its one hotel, called La Belle Hélène, kept by a family among which occur the names of Agamemnon and Orestes. Here, and especially if one knows the family, one will be assured of a good welcome. The retsina, less sparkling than that of Attica, is still good and the food is excellent. Though the hotel is not luxurious, it is clean, and, though there is no electric light, one may, if one decides to stay here, pass the evening by lamplight

The Road to Mycenae

agreeably enough. The visitors' book will recall the visits of archaeologists, soldiers and leaders of Nazi Germany.

From the hotel the road winds uphill for a mile or two. All the way one will be attempting to pick out some prominent peak or obviously dominant position for the fortress that one is about to visit. But this fortress does not reveal the secrets of its strength until one is close to it or even inside it. Somewhere in the grey hills one knows it to be tucked away, and, even after many visits, one may hesitate in pronouncing its exact situation until one is close upon it.

Here, as so often in Greece, the turning of a corner reveals something new and unexpected. A few steps from the place where the road stops will bring one suddenly to the entrance of the Acropolis, a porch built of massive blocks of stone above which stand the famous lions which give the gate its name. The impression is immediate and overpowering. Here is a place of colossal strength, the remains of the most ancient civilization in Europe, something to which we are irrevocably connected, yet something different from the paths of what progress we have made and, in its difference, somehow sinister, cruel, violent and overwhelming. The walls are built for magnificence as well as for defence, and the sheer size of the blocks of stone are an aspect of this magnificence. The fortresses of Eleutherae and of Aegosthena, in spite of their strength, have a kind of grace, even a humanity, about them. But Mycenean architecture strikes one as being, in its size and overloading of weight, somehow devilish. It is not that it is stiff and massive and geometrical like the monuments of Egypt. This people, with all their display of overwhelming power, were also capable of an almost sensual delicacy in their art. Rather, perhaps, one is inclined to feel that the splendour

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actually achieved was something accidental, that these architects were not in the least interested in what among us are the accepted standards of taste. So the most perfect examples of their work, the great bee-hive tombs, were designed, if for any eyes at all, then for the eyes only of the dead and of a funeral cortège.

To the right of the entrance, below the Acropolis itself, is what is assumed to be the royal cemetery, excavated by Schliemann in 1876, where, according to popular tradition, were buried the bodies of Atreus, Agamemnon and Cassandra. Past this circular pit in the ground one ascends to the summit of the hill and on the way can amuse oneself with the conjectures or certainties of archaeological guides as to the precise positions of the various parts of the great palace of the Atridae. Here one may imagine Cassandra standing in terror at her second sight, the visions of slaughtered children and of further slaughter still to come. Here perhaps was the bath where Agamemnon was murdered ; here the chamber where Clytemnestra and Aegisthus enjoyed their guilty loves ; here Orestes revealed himself as an avenger and here first became aware of the pursuing presence of the Erinyes. Far more than this may be imagined on this grey rock which, in the spring, is scarlet with anemones and which, even then, has a grim aspect as though the very scarlet of the flowers was the stain of blood.

I have seen it at all seasons and even in the sunniest weather when the air is full of the murmurs of insects, a sound interrupted continually by the distant noise of goat bells, when light drenches the two great hills between which the citadel of Mycenae stands above its steep gorges, when the grey of these mountains seems white and blazing against the blue sky and

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when, if one looks out to the plain of Argos below and the sea beyond, one will be surveying a view whose calm, flat and various extent must soothe and fascinate the eye—even then this small but immensely powerful rock seems to crouch, alert and instinct with a different kind of life, between mountains that are savage, dominating from its small stature the whole rich plain with a kind of domination that is certain, uncanny and ferocious, like that exercised by a weasel over a rabbit.

I have stood here too in grey and rainy weather when skeins of mist have hung in the gorges and blanketed the two peaks behind. In such conditions, perhaps, this ancient fastness might be expected to wear a desolate and a Gothic air. But it is not precisely so. Nothing here can be imagined of the romantic or the picturesque. Desolate, certainly, and haunted the place may seem, but with a quality that recalls nothing medieval, nothing in the novels of Sir Walter Scott. •

As one walks round the summit of the citadel or descends on the further side, admiring the great bastions built above the sheer descent into the gorge, the Cyclopean architecture of the passage that leads down to the hidden well, everything will confirm one's first impressions. And it is difficult indeed to understand why this place should have an impact on the mind which is as powerful as that made by Delphi, though so extremely different. In Delphi one feels the presence of God or of some sublimity which appears divine; but mysterious and unaccountable as is the full force of this feeling, there are certain geographical features—the tremendous rocks, the high mountain air, the richness and profusion of that stream of olives—which can easily be associated with ideas of sublimity and holiness. At Mycenaæ one's impressions can be, as I have said, the opposite of what might be expected. There is no vast

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extent even of the ruined walls ; there is nothing remarkable in the foundations of the courts of palaces ; the hill itself, though immensely strong, is not high ; nor is it in the least conspicuous, being folded away between two much higher mountains. Yet, of all places, this one pre-eminently, savagely and masterfully exists, so that the whole smiling landscape down to the sea seems to be within its clutches. No doubt one's memories of the bloody legend of the house of Atreus will affect one's sensations when one is standing on the ground where one may imagine Orestes to have stood ; yet people who are ignorant of these legends will be affected in the same way as oneself. Here as elsewhere, it seems to me, we are confronted by a reality, in this case something almost monstrous, which is inexpressible by the ordinary resources of our language. There is something here which remains, making itself felt and feared. Its presence has been felt and described by many witnesses. I do not think that many are impervious to it, though all will grope, as I am groping, vainly for the definite words to describe their feelings.

After one has walked on the citadel, even the valley by which one has ascended will wear a different aspect. Here, outside the Lion Gate, in the ground to the left and right of the road are the two great beehive tombs, one known as the Tomb of Clytemnestra, the other as the Treasury of Atreus. The second of these is in a state of almost perfect preservation, except that the vast walls have been despoiled of the golden rosettes with which they were once decorated, and that the two pilasters which, until recently, flanked the colossal doorway are now in the British Museum.¹ The approach to the

¹ I should like here to quote, with entire approval, a sentence of Osbert Lancaster who writes: "The return of these pilasters, whose empty sockets are a standing

The Road to Mycenae

tomb is along a passage, open to the sky, between walls of enormous and finely-cut stones. Through the high doorway with its vast lintel stone one enters the main chamber, circular, with high walls coming inwards gradually to form the beehive dome. The size and silence of the place, together with the weight and perfection of the masonry, make this, to my mind, one of the most impressive buildings of the world, formidable and exact. Again one will wonder: "Who were these people who left these monuments of prodigious power and perfection, whose legendary lives, for all their evident and even appalling differences from us have entered deep into the soul of our thought, who have stamped something permanent on a landscape and on a rock, and who have disappeared utterly from the face of the earth?" Yet on this rock and in this tomb one can scarcely believe in that disappearance.

reproach to our nation, might far more easily be effected than that of the Elgin marbles. Uninteresting in themselves they should be removed from their pointless isolation in the British Museum and restored to the setting away from which they lose all significance."

Kephalari, Tiryns, Bourtzi, Epidaurus

WHETHER SEEN from the mountains near Mycenaë or from the sea at Nauplia the citadel of Argos stands out in the plain more apparently dominating than Mycenaë itself. Yet a nearer view reveals nothing of the power and strength of the earlier fortress. No doubt both the Heraeon and the theatre are sights to be seen, but, since they have moved me less than many other sights, I shall in this personal account say nothing of them. Nor can I think of any reason which should attract the traveller to the modern town of Argos, or of any amenities to console him if, as often happens, he has to wait some time at the railway station for a train to Nauplia.

If, however, he has a car and an hour to spend, he may be advised, before going on to Tiryns and to Nauplia to go out of Argos a little way by the road to Tripolis and to visit the caves of Pan and Dionysus, now consecrated as Christian sanctuaries, at Kephalari. A few miles out of Argos one will leave the main road and turn to the right along rough tracks and soon discover what is a rare thing in Greece, a swiftly flowing river and not a dried-up watercourse or muddy trickle of liquid. Green trees grow along the banks. There are small and ill-built farmsteads and around the doors and in the yards often the sleeping figures of pigs. Where the river rises there is a pool of limpid water, green grass and trees arching above the pool. It is the source of the river Erasinos, believed to be a subterranean outflowing of the Stymphalian lake which lies far northwards in

Kephalari, Tiryns, Bourtzi, Epidaurus

the mountains. Modern steps and a terrace surround this pool and source of the river which is soon lost in the sea and which in ancient times, so some rationalists believe, may with other streams have given rise to the legend of the Lernaean Hydra—that is if we are to assume that Hercules, instead of engaging with a monster, was in fact occupied in a difficult project of land drainage or irrigation.

Above the terrace from which one may look down on this cool, verdant and shining scene, stands the bright blue dome of a remarkably ugly modern church. Yet the interior of the sacred place is far from modern. Two long caves extend into the hillside, once the caves of Pan and of Dionysus, now consecrated to the worship of the Virgin, but still seeming to preserve a kind of wild and savage sanctity of their own.

At most times of the year the caves and the green river will be deserted except perhaps for a tall black-bearded priest or a few peasant women come to address prayers to the icons that cover the ancient rocky walls. But on the 18th of April the scene is very different. This is the day of the “panegyri” or festival of Kephalari, and on this day the country all round will be filled with cars, lorries, donkey carts, horse-carts, tents, booths, fortune tellers, sellers of all kinds of goods, singers and dancers. The terraces in front of the caves will be crowded with men, women and children drinking and eating. The air will be loud with shouts and singing. So, from early in the day till late at night will still be celebrated each year under Christian auspices the ancient feast of Kephalari which was known as the feast of Riot or Disorder, and which, late at night, may still retain some of its earlier characteristics.

But once again I have imagined a digression from our main route which is from Mycenae to Nauplia.

Views of Attica

After Argos both road and railway traverse the level and fertile plain in the direction of the sea. Already, away to the left, one will have seen, cutting off the view, the promontory and high rock above the port of Nauplia. Soon the road begins to follow the line of the coast and to approach Nauplia itself ; but before we reach this first capital of modern Greece we shall imagine a visit to the most ancient of fortresses at Tiryns which lies by the sea only a few miles from Nauplia and which, although from the road or railway it seems at first sight more like a mound of rubble than a palace of legendary splendour, still has, as Mycenae has, a fantastic and almost inexplicable strength and dignity when one is actually standing on the spot. Again this Cyclopean masonry, whether in the great walls, in the doorposts, in the casements or in the covered galleries, somehow conveys the feeling of appalling and tremendous power. When one has climbed the summit of this little mound, one will be surprised to find oneself in a position that is really dominating, a place more formidable than the far higher citadel of Argos across the plain, a place worthy to be the birthplace of Hercules. What seemed from below a mere dump of insignificant size has now expanded into a fortress of colossal proportions with plenty of room for armies of men as well as for those herds of sheep whose backs and sides are supposed to have polished the glistening stones of the arched galleries. In front is the sea and all around is the level plain. No mountains, as at Mycenae, press in on this stronghold. It stands alone, isolated, and once, if the archaeologists are to be believed, was not only strong but luxurious. Of its history nothing certain is known and little of great interest can even reasonably be conjectured. It lacks even the legendary distinction of having been associated with the house of Atreus. Yet

Kephalari, Tiryns, Bourtzi, Epidaurus

there are many who will find this place, isolated both in time and in geographical space, as imposing as Mycenae itself. Unprofitable as such conjectures may be, one will speculate upon the appearance and upon the disappearance of this race of warriors, of craftsmen and of architects, whose dominion must have lasted so long and must have seemed so securely based. Again one will feel their propinquity as well as their distance. Again, leaving the place, one will seem to breathe more freely as one turns to a landscape which, for all its surprising beauty, is more familiar and seems even more human than this Cyclopean handiwork.

The shores of the gulf of Nauplia are beautiful indeed. Here are no rocks and mountains as in the Saronic Gulf. In many places tall green trees fringe the curving coastline and often the great plain and the sea seem to shinier together in a kind of unity, an unbroken level except where the citadel of Argos stands out above the flood and where, at the eastern extremity of the bay, there rises up the towering citadel of Palamidi above the town of Nauplia. Inland are the mountains around Mycenae that cluster about the narrow pass that leads northward from the plain of Argos. Across the water are the far greater mountains of the central Peloponnese in the direction of Tegea and Sparta. It is a scene that I recall usually as being bathed in blue and brilliant light, a wide and peaceful space defined by the curving promontory of Nauplia and by the great mountains behind which the sun sets, seen, perhaps, most of all to advantage from the small Venetian castle of Bourtzi which can be reached in about five minutes by rowing-boat from the harbour of the town. First, however, one will go through the town itself, a town which, after Corinth, and Argos, will be a relief to look at. Gay colour-washed houses

Views of Attica

with iron balconies give this place its peculiar charm. The streets are busy, the modern squares clean. Here a long Venetian occupation seems to have had the same happy effect on architecture as, in a different way, did the British occupation of Corfu. Being close to the islands of Hydra and Spetsi, whose naval prowess had done so much to destroy the Turkish power, Nauplia became naturally the first capital of independent Greece in 1829. A modern statue commemorates the first President of the republic, Capo d'Istria, assassinated here in 1831 by an ambitious and grudging rival. From that day to this no ruler of Greece has ended his life without having experienced either exile or worse at the hands of his own countrymen.

Past the statue of Capo d'Istria one will walk through the bright streets to the quay where two hotels stand side by side. Over the blue water, built on a rock, is the castle of Bourzzi, now also an hotel and rather more expensive than the other two. Once it was a Venetian castle, and the residence of the hang-man who, because of the feelings of hatred and of horror which he provoked among the Greeks of the mainland, was forced to live in this isolation and security.

Many who have crossed from the mainland to this castle will declare that the view from the boat—the shining water, the whole curving coastline with the citadel of Argos in the distance, the great mountains opposite, the high cliffs and bright town behind, the castle itself with its towers and its irregular battlements—all this in the view and much else—provides a vision of beauty and excitement unique in their experience. As I first came to this castle on a black and rainy winter night I cannot claim the ability to compare first impressions with most people, yet would still maintain that the views from

Kephalari, Tiryns, Bourtzi, Epidaurus

Bourtzi itself are even more remarkable than is the approach to the place. Here one may stand at many different levels and can look out in all directions. On one side, towards Argos, the clear shallow water below the castle walls is blotched and pointed with the black bodies of sea urchins lying on the white sand or rock of the bottom. Beyond are the green trees along the coast and the expanding sunny plain of Argos. Then to the left one may watch the sun sinking behind the long powerful lines of great mountains in the direction of Parnon. Past them the waters of the bay reach out to the open sea, and at the other side is the town of Nauplia, the steep cliff, the high citadel, the distant and minuscule appearance of men and women along the quays. On this side the water is deep and good for bathing. Here at mid-day I remember the sea stretching out motionless in the heat and at dusk ruffled by a little wind. As the sun sets, the water all round the castle, and the distant hills also take on a variety of colours. I remember on my last visit to the place that the sky in the east was redder than the western sky. Long after the light had faded from the great mountains it washed along the shores of the gulf. As it grew darker some fires glowed out over the black water below the mountains. Then the plain itself became indistinct while a few stars rose and lights for shipping sparkled on the line of buoys that mark the entrance to the port of Nauplia. On the occasion which I am recalling it happened to be a day of national celebration, and, after the processions of the morning, the citizens of the town unweariedly continued their rejoicings into the night. A cruiser in the harbour, with all lights showing, first took the eye. As the darkness deepened a torchlight procession became visible in the distance, and, to the confused accompaniment of shouting, began to ascend the hill. High up

the hill itself the face of a church was illuminated. Bright blue lights formed a square at the top right-hand corner of which the somewhat absurd figure of a bird, also shaped in blue lights, flashed out above all the rest of the profuse illumination. Later a half moon rose over the sea, shining directly down the gulf. At first the light upon the water was like a shoal of golden fish, half-emergent, plunging and struggling, or like some miraculously strewn handfuls and loads of the yellow autumn leaves of poplar, shaken or sieved over the darkness. Later, when the stars were all out, the moonlight in the distance seemed a lake of silver that narrowed up to the eye into a silver road broken by black moving and shifting bars. Very remote now seemed even the gorgeous celebrations of the town, and the noise of radios that blared over the water was half lost or indistinct in the nearer and gentler sounds of waves lapping against the rock. If nature alone could bring peace, this would be the place to find it, here in the old residence of Venetian hangmen, opposite the memorable prison on the hill which in recent times has housed members of different nations and of opposing factions. Yet peace has seldom settled along the gulf. The ancients did not attempt to find it in the vicinity of Tiryns or of Mycenae. Instead they sought for it out of sight of the sea in the valley of Epidaurus.

To-day one can reach this valley and sanctuary by car in an hour or so from Nauplia. In ancient times so remote a place can never have been very easily accessible from this direction; yet, as is shown by the size of the theatre and of the temples and of the various sanatoria, many thousands of people from all over the Greek world must have flocked to this centre of healing sacred to the god Aesculapius. Indeed it is easy to see that this medical deity had an importance which is usually

Kephalari, Tiryns, Bourtzi, Epidaurus

denied to him by our popular mythologies. He was the son of Apollo by a Thessalian princess named Coronis. According to one story Apollo engaged a crow to watch over the behaviour of his mistress in his absence from her. The crow soon reported her infidelity and the angry god destroyed her with lightning, preserving, however, her unborn child who was in due time entrusted to the wise centaur Chiron and by him instructed in all the arts of medicine. Apollo, who is apt to appear as the most sanctimonious of the gods, has a bad record with women, as is pointed out by Euripides in his "Ion". The other story of the birth of Aesculapius scarcely redounds more to the god's credit. In this story Coronis, deserted by her divine lover and frightened of her father's anger, exposed the new-born child in the mountains near Epidaurus. Here the child was suckled by a she-goat and guarded by the dog that watched the flock. When discovered by the goatherd the baby's divine origin was apparent by the rays of light which streamed from his head. Later he went with the Argonauts to Colchis. His skill in medicine was so great that he frequently not only cured the living but restored the dead to life. Pluto, fearing that his Kingdom would thus inevitably be retracted, persuaded Jupiter to kill the great physician by a thunderbolt. Yet before this the art of medicine had been firmly established and one of the children of Aesculapius was Hygeia, the goddess of health. Aesculapius himself was worshipped as a god and worshipped particularly at Epidaurus. The cock was sacred to him and the last words of Socrates were spoken in his honour. Snakes also were peculiarly connected with his worship and in sculpture his bearded figure is usually flanked by snakes, one of which encircles the staff that he carries.

Views of Attica

To-day as one approaches the sanctuary from Nauplia there is little in the wild country to remind one that once the place must have been thronged with seekers after health or diversion or both. Red earth and olives, like the ground of Attica, cover much of the way. Looking back along the road one will see the high flat ridges of the mountains beyond the gulf of Nauplia. Not until one has almost arrived will one notice in a hillside that is in no way spectacular a patch of slate-blue colour which is in fact the famous theatre. Yet before one reaches the theatre once more will come the sudden surprise of a quick and almost inexplicable change of landscape and of atmosphere. The dusty road slowly descends to a valley. There are poplars on the right. Suddenly one will find oneself among pine trees of a most vivid green and near the pine trees is an expanse of brilliantly green grass. To the left are already visible the widely scattered remains of baths and temples. To the right is the long green stadium and here perhaps one will stop for a moment and will feel immediately that this place too has its genius, a genius of pervading calm. Here among the trees above the green grass of the stadium, with the scarcely distinguishable but gigantic ruins on the other side of the road, one is in an atmosphere different entirely from that of Delphi or of Mycenae or of the Acropolis of Athens. Yet just as all these differ from each other and are real, so there is its own reality in this valley, something which seems compounded not only of the visible but of the invisible.

This feeling for the place may occur at once or it may gradually enter the mind after one has followed the road to the place where it ends with the museum on the left and the great theatre on the right. A visit to the museum with its reconstructions of the great and intricate buildings of the past, a



John Lehman

Bourtzi



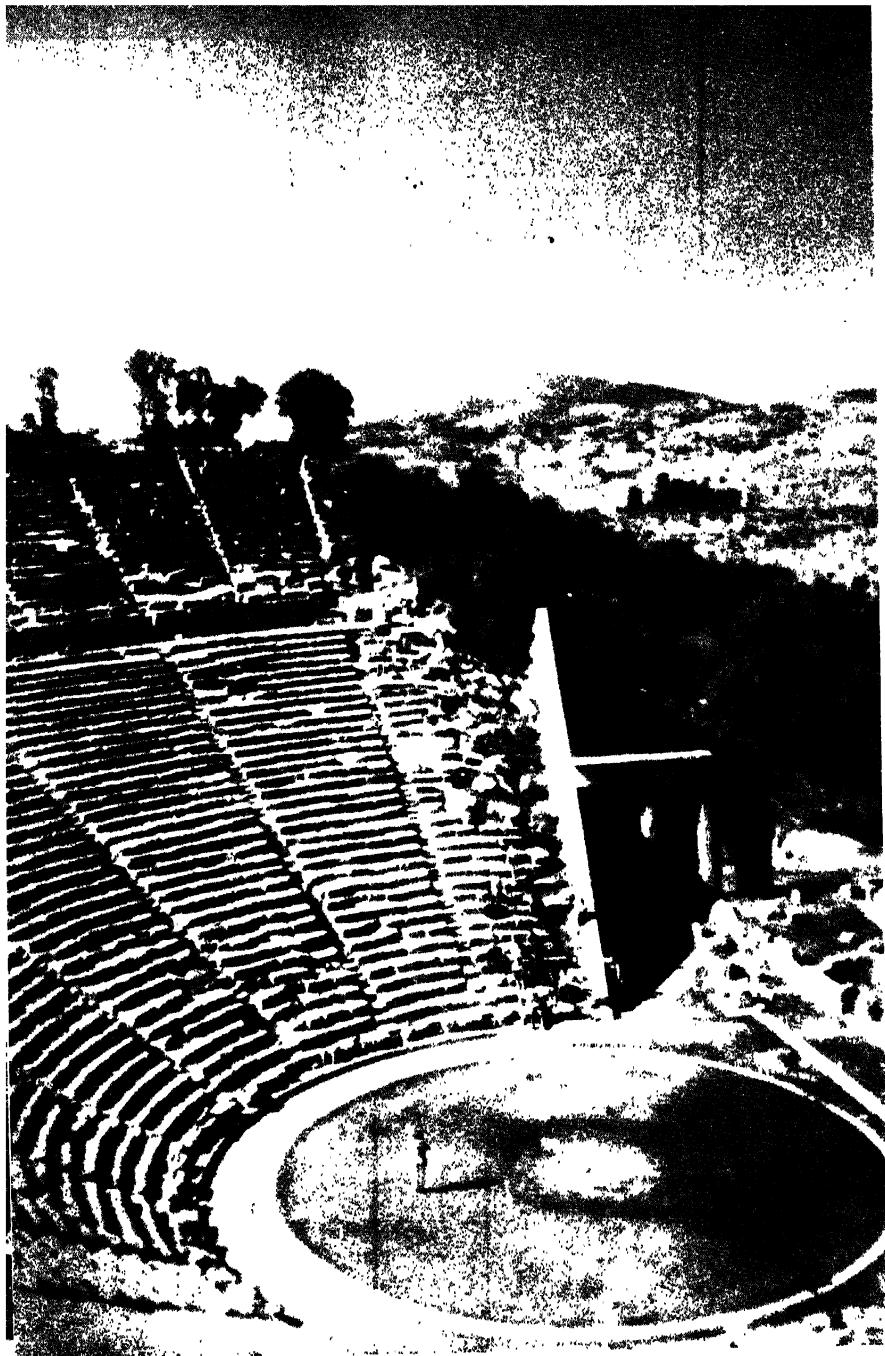
John Lehmann

View from Bourtzzi



b II

The Road to Epidaurus



B. Warner

Epidaurus: The Theatre

Kephalaia, Thyrs, Bourzi, Epidaurus

sight of the exquisite capitals of columns flowered and budding in marble, an inscription or a fragment of sculpture may stimulate understanding or imagination, so that the whole green valley can again impart some of the life and healing for which it was renowned. Nor is it the enormous theatre itself, but its surroundings and its situation that are really moving. It is far bigger than the theatres of Athens and in any other position its very size might convey an impression of vulgarity. Here, however, let us imagine that we have climbed the steep steps to the very top and can look down at the green circle of the orchestra far below where human figures seem small but from which a human voice, not unnaturally raised, can carry right up to the back of the enormous auditorium. Away in the distance over trees and valleys are still visible the great mountains at the other side of the gulf of Nauplia, though this line is broken by the emergence of hills in the middle distance and the sea itself is out of sight. To the right and near at hand is a small olive tree loaded with fruit; beyond the olive and some pines are low green hills and, shutting out the view in this direction, a long white mountain with one steep face streaked with red. In the great panorama every gradation is gradual. Calm reigns.

By what processes, of medical skill, of natural sanity, of religion or of superstition the priests of Aesculapius achieved their numerous cures we have little or no knowledge. Theatrical performances played their part, as did the frescoes depicting Love and Drunkenness, the library, the baths and the gymnasia. There were, no doubt, services of initiation and visions of snakes which came to people in the night. The size and luxury of some of the therapeutical establishments was prodigious. Yet it is not easily to be believed that at any time

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this place resembled anything which we know of in our times, neither a religious retreat nor a resort for the sporting holidays of the rich. It retains its atmosphere of tranquillity, even of piety, though of its magnificence only the theatre remains as a fitting monument. But it is mysterious in a way that previously it was not ; for, though we can estimate and even feel its importance, we can scarcely understand it. Here the earth itself seems charged with powers of healing. It is an atmosphere very different from that provided by the impersonal and accidentally localised equipment of a modern hospital. Vast indeed have been the improvements which we have made in the accuracy of our operations and in the extent of our knowledge. Yet, standing among the ruins of Epidaurus and imagining the far greater ruins which we in the height of our civilisation have made in a few years over the whole face of Europe, recalling the inveterate sickness of so many who are scientifically pronounced to be healthy, one may perhaps think longingly of that dimly understood and unscientific medical practice of Aesculapius which, inaccurate as no doubt it was, did, it seems, work in respect of the whole personality, attached itself to a particular place and was associated with reverence for divine powers.

Mount Penteli and the North-east Suburbs

THESE IMAGINARY excursions to the north and south of Athens have, I fear, detained me too long from the central position of Attica which I have chosen as the main subject of this study or rather of this declaration of affection. Yet even in these short chapters how much I have omitted! There is no mention of Asine, close by Nauplia, and of the poem of Seferis which recalls what has not really vanished. And I am tempted to linger over the return journey to Athens, remembering first how once at the feast of the Epiphany, in dull grey weather, I watched in the harbour of Nauplia the cross being thrown into the water, while in rowing boats all round the athletic youth of the place crouched ready to spring into the cold sea for the honour of retrieving the holy object. On this occasion the cross, for some reason, when it had left the hand of the priest, seemed to float upon the water. The result was that the more ardent and ambitious divers plunged far below it, while it was easily recovered by a boy who jumped last into the disturbed waves, whether from timidity or from greater intelligence. After this scene and the procession which followed it, we visited both Tiryns and Mycenae in driving rain, an experience for which I am grateful, having seen these places so frequently since then in the bright light of spring or summer or autumn.

Indeed on the road back there are many stopping places, many tavernas, many views at all seasons of the year that I

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remember. Yet also at all seasons I remember the feeling of delight, as at a homecoming, when Corinth and Megara were behind, when one passed again along the shores of the bay of Eleusis, climbed the hill towards Daphni and once more came in sight of the widespread illumination, if it was night, of Athens, or, if it was in the evening, of the violet circle of her hills.

So far, in leaving or returning to the city, I have imagined always this same road to the west through Eleusis, and I have imagined our journeys as taking us, for the most part, to places with ancient and famous names. Now I should like to imagine a less ambitious excursion along a popular bus route through the north-eastern suburbs to the slopes of Penteli.

If in fact we were travelling by bus we should find one waiting to start in one of the squares between Syntagma and Omonoia. Suppose that we take the bus either to Kephisia or beyond Kephisia to Ekali, being free in imagination to leave the bus from time to time either to the right or left of the road.

Bus journeys in Greece can be delightful in themselves, occasions for social merriment and discussion ; they can also be, at certain times of the day or at periods when the tramways are on strike, remarkably uncomfortable. No Greek is willing to admit that either a bus, a ship or a taverna can ever be entirely full to capacity. It is a sentiment shared both by those who wish to enter these enclosed spaces and by those who have the power to give right of entry. Thus the most extraordinary overcrowding is usually accompanied by good humour. At stopping places there will be general co-operation, so that enormous old women carrying baskets almost as big as themselves will somehow reach the door and be deposited on the

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pavement, having passed through dense wedged masses of standing passengers, like camels easily going through a needle's eye.

But these buses are by no means always full. And both on the journey and while waiting for the bus to start there will often be entertainment of some kind or other. Perhaps there will be a band of picnickers who, on taking their seats, will immediately burst into song. One of them may have a guitar or a harmonica. Perhaps a seller of pistachio nuts will enter the bus, anxious certainly to sell his wares but quite prepared, if no one seems willing to buy, to engage instead in a conversation about the price of food or the prospects of the present government. He will also enjoy gambling with the nuts which he may either sell or have to give away. One simply takes a handful of nuts and allows him to guess whether the number taken is odd or even. If he is wrong one keeps, say, ten nuts ; if he is right, one pays for them. Usually he ends by being right.

There may be sellers too of all kinds of other objects,—sweets covered with paper wrappers that depict the features of film stars, collar studs, vegetables and fountain pens. There is both alacrity and intelligence in the way in which the goods are recommended to possible customers ; but there is also a good-humoured acceptance of a refusal, an interest in and respect for another point of view,—in general an attitude very different from that adopted by the sellers of such articles in the streets of Naples or of Rome.

In the end, and often after a discussion with the driver as to what precisely is the right time, the bus will start. With its horn loudly sounding it will sway and thread its way through the traffic to the Kephisia road where it will turn left and

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proceed in the direction of Psychico and Maroussi, with the Royal Gardens on the right and the slopes of Lycabettus and Kolonaki on the left.

From here one can see what is not visible from the centre of the city, the long extent of Mount Lycabettus with the pine woods on its rocky sides. Seen from the front this hill seems like a cone or steep pyramid, and many are content simply to climb to the church on its summit and from there enjoy the view of Athens and the sea. Yet a walk along the whole length of the hill behind, through quarries that recall a lunar landscape, is very strongly to be recommended. As one circles the hill, so the view changes from moment to moment. Parnes gives place to Penteli, Penteli to Hymettus. Then, climbing over the grey rock where flowers miraculously grow, one may approach the white church on the top from the back and find suddenly the Acropolis, Piraeus and the sea before one's eyes.

For some time the road runs below this ridge that seems so surprisingly long. We are going towards those suburbs which are, on the whole, resorts of the rich, though here again there is no such absolute division as may be noticed in the smart quarters of other cities or in English seaside housing estates. Shacks scarcely worthy of habitation can be found among the great luxury hotels of Kephisia or among the unplanned, speculative, and often jerry-built bungalows of Psychico.

In a few minutes the road divides. The way to the right sweeps round the northern end of Mount Hymettus and then forks again, in one direction to Marathon, in the other to Liopesi, Laurion and Sunium. We keep to the left-hand road. Hymettus is still on our right, and to the left, instead of Lycabettus, is the bare sandy ridge of the Turko-Vouno. This is a low mountain which from the road looks unprepossessing

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enough. Yet it is a good place for walking, particularly at its northern end near the suburb of Psychico, a quarter full of modern bungalows and villas, one of the latest and most lucrative examples of Greek speculation in building. Yet a walk of five minutes uphill from this fashionable suburb will bring one into wild and unspoilt country. In spring there will be anemones growing on the grey rock of the mountain. Flocks of sheep and goats will appear here in as natural an environment as if they were in the hills around Delphi. Beyond, to the north, is the plain dotted with hamlets, stretching to Heraklion, Menidi and Parnes. In the north-east is Penteli and Hymettus to the south. Southwestwards is the sea with Aegina rising from the sea. Were it not for the existence of the Acropolis and of Lycabettus it might well be said that this often despised Turko-Vouno afforded one of the world's most magnificent views. Having walked on it myself so often and with such pleasure, I should be ungrateful if I did not record my enthusiasm for the place.

From Psychico the road gradually ascends to Maroussi and Kephisia. These suburbs are older, sometimes more shabby but usually more dignified than Psychico. There are avenues of tall trees and high houses built in a French style. In the square at Kephisia there is a great number of horse-drawn cabs, and all around are tavernas, vegetable shops, flowering plants that can scarcely vie in colour with the great piles of cabbages, carrots, tomatoes, beetroot, egg-plants and other vegetables that are exposed for sale. To the right are already the lower slopes of Mount Penteli and here too are a vast number of hotels, some of them enormous buildings, designed chiefly to cater for those who in the hot months wish to escape from Athens to the cooler mountain air.

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Not far beyond Kephisia our bus will stop among the pine woods of Ekali. Here too there are innumerable hotels, villas and minute houses among the pines whose strong scent loads the air on summer days. Human habitation here and elsewhere on this side of Penteli seems to have taken place quite haphazardly. There is no evidence of any kind of planning. Constantly in open dusty spaces or in the middle of pinewoods one will come across some small house, its garden marked out by a square of white stones and full, perhaps, of zinias or of geraniums. Sometimes, though the plot or miniature estate has been duly marked out, only the foundations of the house or only one of the walls will have been built. Such sights suggest sudden failures in business, too reckless speculation, or perhaps death or exile in the family.

All this haphazard building and even the extreme ugliness of some examples of it makes little difference to the beauty of the place ; indeed these scattered and idiosyncratic vestiges of humanity confer an additional charm upon the landscape. In the golden light that streams from the sky and seems to be held and tangled among the pines one may walk in any direction with pleasure. If one walks back to Kephisia along the slopes of Penteli one will find oneself often in deserted country. Far away to the right rises the huge mass of Parnes shimmering in the heat across the plain. The brown earth on which one treads is strewn with the glistening white stones of Penteli. Among the pines may be wandering flocks of goats, black, pale brown and lop-eared, with their turned-up tails, their melting and enormous eyes. In groups of cottages one may see women cooking in the open air and will hear the shrill screams with which mothers are accustomed to summon their children. The children themselves add brightness and variety to the

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scene. I can still remember the stationary and grave figure of a small child dressed in a scarlet tunic and white knickers, pale-skinned, with a fringe of black hair and great black eyes. This child was pressing against her breast a round yellow loaf and clutched in the other hand an enormous cucumber of pale and acid green.

So as one walks along these hills in this wide and spacious landscape there will always be some significant detail in the foreground to attract the eye,—olives set against a white wall, the peculiar shape of certain pines, animals, people and the irregular appearance of their dwellings. Once, rather higher up the mountain, I captured a small tortoise, a creature most exquisitely marked and, as I discovered later, when it made its escape, capable of great speed.

As for Penteli itself, there are various routes by which the mountain may be ascended. The shortest route is perhaps from the north face, but this is also far the steepest way. Perhaps the easiest ascent is from the great marble quarries up to which it is possible to drive in a car. From here an hour's walking, some of it over steep ground, will bring one to the summit. On the way up one will have frequently turned to admire the tremendous view over the plain of Athens, with Parnes and Hymettus and the distant sea. The view in these directions will continually expand. Behind the mountains of Attica are Helicon, Cithaeron and Parnassus, and, in the far distance, the mountains of the Peloponnese. And on reaching the summit there will be revealed suddenly to one's eyes the wholly different view of northern Attica and Euboea. Sparkling in the middle distance are the curved blue waters of the great reservoir provided by the Marathon dam. Beyond are mountains in the direction of the coast at Rhamnus and Kalamos, the

curving gulf of Marathon, and beyond the coast the higher mountains of Euboea itself. Turning to the south-east one can look over the Mesogeia to the southern Attic coast at Laurion and beyond to the sea and the Cyclades. To my mind these views, both northwards and southwards, from Penteli are altogether incomparable in grandeur, serenity, balance and variety.

The descent is by no means difficult, and one of the easiest ways down is directly to the outskirts of Kephisia. Here at the very edge of the town and at the blank end of a road one will find a taverna and will be glad enough, by this time, to eat and drink. The taverna which I have in mind, though it seems to me to have grown to rather unwieldy proportions in recent years, has excellent food and excellent retsina. It is also ideally situated. Yet here, as in the case of many Greek tavernas, the architect seems to have been totally unaware of where he was. Few views could be better than they might be from this place, yet the best view is entirely cut off by a high wall and the tables and chairs are so arranged that it is almost impossible to see from any angle the fine slopes of the mountain which one has descended.

Another descent, rather longer but more gradual, is towards the monastery of Penteli, a place in itself well worth visiting, a peaceful place with its high white-washed walls standing among great trees with green grass below them and the flow of water. And not far from here, huge, incongruous, yet curiously moving, is the unfinished Gothic palace of the Duchesse de Plaisance, a lady ennobled by Napoleon, who, after the fall of the dynasty, came to Greece and, with her daughter, chose to inhabit what was then this lonely spot in the mountains. She had other palaces but, through some

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eccentric desire for an inappropriate splendour, began and almost finished this great structure of stone in an alien style. When last I saw it the high walls were dripping with moisture ; there was moss among the brown crevices ; instead of the pines one might have expected to see the dripping beech woods or larches of the north. Near the castle is the tomb of the Duchess's daughter, with tall cypresses growing round it. The two ladies are assumed to have found a lover or lovers among the more uncivilized inhabitants of the mountains and there are stories which illustrate both rivalry and affection. Now both castle and tomb are deserted except for the parties of picnickers or walkers who come here on their excursions from Athens or from Maroussi.

As for the excursion which I have imagined in this chapter, I have recommended more walking than could easily be accomplished in a single day and have by this time brought the reader to a position some distance away from our original bus-route. I shall not attempt to describe his return to it, since there are different ways, whether through Maroussi or through the large village of Khalandri opposite Psychico on the other side of the main road. From here one will look back at the mountain which one has left and from this distance already it will seem remote and queerly, with long slopes reaching to a summit that looks gentler than in fact it is. In the evening the purple air will lie about it like a veil, and in this illumination it seems to be folding itself away in a kind of virginal security, not to be itself imparting light, as Hymettus does at this time.

Hymettus and Parnes

HAVING IMAGINED in some detail the ascent of one of the Athenian mountains, I shall write rather more briefly of the other two, and, though the views from these heights are magnificent enough, shall not even assume that we are making for the summits. Indeed the summits both of Hymettus and of Parnes are not so inviting as is that of Penteli, being either invisible or not easily recognizable from a distance.

The bare rock of Hymettus, seen from Athens, lies always like a long wave poised against the eastern sky, shadowy or radiant or, in bad weather, half hidden by cloud. About half-way along its steep slopes, facing Athens and already high in the mountain, is the monastery of KAESARIANI, a building as beautiful as Daphni itself and built in a site just as ancient. For in this mountain gorge there is a famous fountain, once sacred to Aphrodite and described by Ovid in his *Ars Amatoria*. The Christian church which now stands here is smaller than the church of Daphni, but both by its position and by its exquisite proportions, is equally moving. A tall pine tree curves across the open space of the courtyard. Great cypresses reach into the sky behind the roots and the small rounded dome. An antique pillar stands in front of the narrow doorway that leads into the dark interior where the Ionic columns of the past have been used by the Byzantine architect with the utmost success to secure an effect so completely different from

Hymettus and Parnes

any for which this style was originally designed. At this elevation and among these rocks one might expect that a religious building of the Christian Church might convey an impression of austerity and asceticism ; but, whether it is because of the trees that surround the place or, more likely, because of the firm elegance of the architecture, the impression is rather one of calm and peace and friendliness. A short walk from the monastery will bring one into sight of the distant Acropolis of Athens and the sea. Though the distance is not really great, one will feel curiously remote so powerful is the effect of this arrangement of masonry on so small a scale in a hollow of the gigantic mountain.

In rather more than an hour one can ascend from here to the summit by what the French guide book correctly describes as a "sentier pénible". But a more convenient way of examining the other side of the mountain is to go to its northern end where it is much lower and where the white walls of the monastery of St. John the Hunter stand at the top of an easy ascent. In the monastery are often to be found white turkeys and goats. To the north and west is the wide and splendid view of the Attic plain, and to the south-east is now visible the different and charming landscape of the Mesogeia, a country of rounded hills and fertile ground, where in the spring wide masses of cherry blossom meet the eye and where some of the woods and coppices will momentarily recall the English countryside. Below Hymettus on this side is the village of Liopesi through which goes the road to Laurion and to Sunium. And no doubt the traveller should be encouraged to make this popular excursion. At distant Sunium itself the white temple of Poseidon is superbly situated to dominate the approaches to Athens from the sea. The Doric columns, of

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which twelve are still standing, have a lean and athletic appearance very different from the robust grace of the columns of the Parthenon. Here on this high promontory the temple seems to stand like a diver, stripped, and ready to dive or, since it is divine, to fly into the air. One of the columns bears, among other scrawls, the deeply cut name of Byron, an autograph which, if it is indeed the work of the poet, must have kept him occupied for many hours. All around the temple and the steep slopes of the cliff where it stands are the remains of German or Italian fortifications. Close to the cape, in the blue and flashing water, lies the island of St. George. Away in the distance is the Aigolid and the island of Hydra. Further east are the Cyclades,—Keos, Tenos, Andros and Melos. It is indeed a place to visit and its appearance is well prepared for by the last miles of the road from Laurion, a grim and modern mining town lying opposite the long island of Makronesos, a piece of country flat, metallic and, for Greece, almost colourless.

I have been often to Sunium and always with delight. Yet always I have looked forward to that part of the return journey when one is again beneath the slopes of Hymettus, where one can again stop in the garden of Liopesi with more distinctly Attic country around one and be hospitably entertained with the bright coccinelli, with fruit, flowers and pieces of meat. Had it not been for this garden where I have passed so many hours I might have written at greater length and with a higher degree of enthusiasm of Poseidon's temple at Sunium. As it is, I have, I hope, written nothing to deter a traveller from visiting one of the most magnificent of sites, since I have only recommended him, while doing so, to stop at least once by the wayside.

Hymettus and Parnes

Behind Liopesi the face of Hymettus is steep, but a little further along it is possible to climb the mountain and again reach the Monastery of St. John the Hunter and the wholly different view of the plain to the north in the direction of Parnes.

Parnes is not less beautiful than the other two mountains, but differs from each of them as each differs from the other. The general shape of the mountain, seen from the Attic plain, is more solid, masculine and robust than is the individual shape of Penteli or the powerful long line of Hymettus. The greater part of the mass is bare and rocky, but the higher parts are covered with forests of pines and firs, a kind of Alpine scenery quite unlike anything to be found on Hymettus or even on Penteli. It is here that the snow in winter and spring lies most heavily and lasts longest.

If one approaches the mountain from the large and pleasant village of Menidi in the plain, it will tower above one as an insuperable bastion of rock. And by the direct road which runs zig-zagging up its face it is indeed insuperable. The road stops dead at about the level where the forests begin. But from this road, as it climbs the mountain, there appears and reappears now from one direction, now from another, the tremendous panorama of the Attic plain and of the sea and islands beyond. I have already, perhaps, too frequently expatiated on the magnificence of views seen from the mountains, yet still it would be unforgivable not to emphasize the magnificence of this view and not to assert the fact that, though one may have seen Athens and Hymettus from every other direction, one has not seen them completely unless one has seen them also from Parnes.

At the place where the road stops there are tavernas, huts

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and other amenities for those who come here for walking or for skiing; and from here paths branch off into the wooded heights. There are deep valleys and ravines, glades of green grass in the early spring, eagles often sailing in the bright air above the pointed trees. Here indeed one is more conscious of being "in the mountains" than "on a mountain", for, in spite of its singular and individual appearance from Athens, Parnes is in fact a great range, reaching out northwards as well as to the west and east.

One road ascends the eastern shoulder of the mountain and crosses it to join the northern coast at Oropos. It is a road that climbs from the plain in the direction of Tatoi where the King's country-palace is situated among woods of pines, cypresses and olives. Below these woods there are two tavernas, both justly famous for their food. One of these is particularly remarkable for its sausages to which the presence of thyme and other herbs imparts a peculiar and entrancing flavour. Here also the architect has gone sadly astray, for, as one sits in the bright sun and the fine mountain air, one's view is almost entirely interrupted by a large circular water tower and the undistinguished building of an hotel. Yet here the air is so appetizing, the food so gratifying to the appetite, the wine, with the sunlight streaming through it, so agreeable to the taste, that as a rule one finds little difficulty in being pleased and happy with the table at which one sits.

Near here are the remains of the ancient fortifications of Decelea, a place of great importance in the Peloponnesian war. It was by this road to the north that Athens received her imported foodstuffs from Euboea, and, when a Spartan garrison permanently occupied the place in the year 413 B.C. they were able not only throughout the year to interrupt the

processes of agriculture in the Athenian plain, but also to cut Athens off from an important source of outside supplies. It has always seemed to me remarkable that, if historians are to be believed, the Spartan government, after about eighteen years of war, could not even then by itself hit upon so obvious an idea, but had to depend upon the excellent advice of the exiled Alcibiades.

If the occupation of this fortress contributed largely to the defeat of the Athenian democracy by Sparta, it was the occupation of Phyle, the western fortress on Parnes, by Thrasybulus in 404 B.C. which was the first step in the recovery of Athenian liberties. Phyle lies high in the mountains at the western end of the range. The fortress dominates the ancient route from Athens to Thebes. If one contemplates making the journey by car, it is well to be supplied with a car capable of traversing roads which are, even for Greece, unusually rough and steep. Otherwise one will have to do the last and steepest part of the way on foot.

The castle itself is more dramatically and imposingly sited even than Aegosthena or Eleutherae. It stands above gorges and precipices, and from its still considerable walls one can look down over the whole plain of Attica with Athens itself and the gleaming 'cropolis in the far distance. Pinewoods surround the place and again it is very suddenly that one comes upon this stupendous vision. Steep precipices of grey rock, with a few pines writhing out from the rock, plunge downwards from the walls. Yet in these mountains too there are, not far away, grassy slopes, the huge shadows of plane trees, and a beauty that is not formidable. And, in spite of the loftiness of the place and the precipices which surround it, in spite of its evident strength, this castle does not impress one as

either terrifying or uniquely dominant as do the buildings of Tiryns and of Mycenae. In spite of Thrasybulus, Athens is too far to be controlled from here. Moreover there is a certain decency in the architecture, as though this building was designed simply for defence, not for the exercise of some monstrous power.

It was not this very place, they say, but a rather older fortification on a neighbouring height which was occupied by Thrasybulus and his seventy democrats resolved to overthrow the Thirty Tyrants. And from this distance the far city cannot have seemed an easy object to attain. In the end however the democrats were successful, Thrasybulus himself refusing all reward for his achievement except a wreath made of two olive twigs. One of the first acts of the new government was the execution of Socrates—an act carried out under the correct processes of the law, one which to the returned democrats must have meant very little and which perhaps in the mountain fastnesses of Phyle was never even discussed among themselves, except in such general terms as might be used in recommending or desiring the punishment of collaborators. To them and to subsequent governments, perhaps, the building of the new fortress which still stands was a more important thing than had been the legal prosecution of one who, so unjustly and surprisingly, had been accused of atheism and of corrupting the youth. Yet in fact the armies, the fleets and the fortresses of Athens were already becoming something anachronistic in a world where far wider organizations than those of the city state were already beginning to struggle for power. And the future of Athens herself was to depend more upon her philosophers than her politicians. Both Socrates and Thrasybulus were honest men. One, except among students

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of ancient history, is forgotten. The other has exercised an influence more powerful, perhaps, than any single European thinker. It is not a new thing in Greece that the best of intentions should lead, one way or another, to disaster.

Marathon and the Northern Coast

IN THE imagination of the ancient Athenians the battle of Marathon must have filled even a larger place than did the defeat of the Spanish Armada in the imagination of our own Protestant and nationalistic ancestors. Thus a natural piety will lead one to visit the curved plain by the sea where the battle was fought, and the high mound built over the remains of the 192 Athenian dead, the first but by no means the last of Greeks who have died in defending Europe from the east. There will be much else also to see on the way to Marathon and beyond it, for this road leads to the coast opposite Euboea through country less spectacular, perhaps, than are the ascents of Parnes, but as beautiful as any to be found in Attica.

At the northern end of Hymettus we turn left. The right-hand road is the one that goes to Liopesi and Sunium. The road to Marathon winds at first through a plain where, on the right, grow the rich vineyards and orchards between Spata and Liopesi. In autumn the ground is golden and brown with the withering vine leaves and in winter sunlight the naked trunks and boughs of fig trees stand in the fields like solid, shining and individual ghosts. To the left are the eastern slopes of Penteli, which soon begins to lose the characteristic shape that one knows, as does Hymettos on the right.

Small hills and steep ridges rise from the plain. Many of the almost perpendicular hillsides are here, as elsewhere in Greece,

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still subjected to cultivation—a measure of the difficulty with which a livelihood can be extracted from this scarce and stubborn soil.

After a drive of half an hour or so from Athens, we will come to the village of Pikermi, a place which for palaeontologists is of some importance, for in a river bed near here were discovered the fossil remains of rhinoceroses, giraffes, monkeys and prehistoric animals of various kinds—indications that at a remote period of history the fauna of Greece was similar to that of East Africa. I remember Pikermi myself chiefly for its two tavernas. One of them is a fairly modern pink building outside which a peacock is often to be seen strutting or displaying its tail in the brilliant sun. These birds occur frequently and, in my experience, always unexpectedly in Greece. There is a monastery high up near the citadel in Salonica where, beneath the pine trees in the courtyard, one may find oneself in a moment, in the middle of a sentence, in a twinkling of an eye, surrounded by peacocks and by white turkeys in great numbers at the same time. So noiselessly for the most part do these birds make their appearances.

In the other taverna, a long white building, I remember a great feast soon after Christmas on a day so cold that at first one ate and drank as much for warmth as for appetite. Gradually, however, as the smoky fire began to make itself felt in the room we forgot the icy wind through which we had come. There were the flesh and entrails of two whole lambs to be eaten, one roasted on the spit, one stewed in thyme. Soon there was singing and before long dancing as well. By the time we returned to Athens we were oblivious of the cold.

A little distance from Pikermi the road crosses a water course that runs through woods. Here in the year 1870 a party of

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English tourists were captured by brigands who withdrew with their captives to the fastnesses of Penteli where, doubtful of their ransom and hotly pursued by official forces, they murdered four of the party. This, until recent years, was the last instance of brigandage in Greece.

Soon after crossing this stream the road again divides. The way to Marathon is to the left, but if one were to go to the right one would come in a few minutes to the little sea-port of Raphina. I remember a christening which I attended in this place, a service of far greater length and complexity than that adopted by the Church of England, but conducted in a spirit of rejoicing, friendliness and ease. The godfather was a general, well-known in Athenian society. On the way to Raphina he had sung, in a high-pitched voice, such songs as "If you were the only girl in the world". Then too there was a song in Greek written to the music of "Yippy-ippy-I" which at this time was regarded as the victory anthem of the allied army. The words set to this triumphal tune, being translated, were "My girl first had Italians; then she had Germans; then she had English in their little shorts, and finally a regiment of Hindoos." Now in the small church, the general from Athens, who had divested himself of his jacket and stood dapper and erect in his white silk shirt and dark trousers, remained in front of the font, holding the infant rather gingerly in his arms. Sometimes he would look round and wink at one of us, indicating his pleasure in the role which he was performing. Near the priest stood the father of the child, a middle-aged, stout, robust man. Sometimes he would listen carefully to the priest's words, rather as though to assure himself that all was in order than from any evident piety; sometimes he would turn aside and in a loud voice give orders in connection with some detail

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of the christening feast which he had overlooked. The child's mother, dressed in white, was a young girl whose sole function seemed to be the carrying of the baby in and out of church. She was accompanied by a girl even younger than herself, a sister or a friend, and remained throughout the ceremony whispering excitedly in the background. The rest of the congregation stood in groups, sometimes listening to the service, sometimes chatting to each other. Altogether there was excitement in the air, and at one point the priest paused in his prayers, demanding somewhat indignantly whether his words were too long to be worth listening to. This protest immediately secured a more reverent attention from the congregation. The child's father muttered some cheerful and consolatory remark, at the same time clapping the priest on the back. And, as the service drew to its conclusion, as the devil was renounced, the child over and over again marked with the sign of the cross and plunged entirely into the water, so the interest of the bystanders in the ceremony increased. The general was relieved of the burden that he had carried for so long. The mother shyly and proudly took the baby in her arms. Everyone shook hands or embraced. "May it live for you," they said repeatedly to the gratified parents.

After this there was feasting, singing and dancing. The priest joined the marriage party and excelled in the singing of Cretan songs. Now the voice that inside the church had been rich and sonorous became quavering and high-pitched as he sang, giving the most concentrated attention to rhythm and to music, remembering with some difficulty some of the words.

I remember that on another occasion, in the company of the same hospitable general, we crossed from Raphina to Euboea

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in the boat belonging to a friend of the father of the child whom we had seen baptized. We crossed the blue and rolling water in the early afternoon, and as the ship swayed and slid among the waves a huge turtle came to the surface, travelling, it seemed, almost as fast as we were travelling ourselves. We visited Euboea and several islands that lie off the Euboean coast. From the sea we could look northward to the great bay of Marathon enclosed by the long promontory of Kynosoura or "the Dog's Tail". In front was one of the mountains of Euboea lying like a sleeping giantess against the sky, and indeed, according to the legend, this mountain was once in fact a nymph who is now petrified as the result, probably, of the intervention of Artemis to save her follower from the pursuit of a predatory god. Below this mountain and in one of the neighbouring islands we were so hospitably entertained throughout the hot afternoon and the evening that it was already night before we were on the sea again; but the dark swell was lit up by a rising moon which before long flooded also with light the mountains which we were leaving and the mountains between us and Athens. At Raphina, though it was very late, our host persuaded us to eat another meal. We should scarcely have accepted the invitation had we known that there was already waiting for us, by his orders, at Pikermi, an enormous lobster, fried eggs and plates full of walnuts and honey. Yet, since it was nearly dawn by the time we reached it, this meal too was eaten with the greatest appetite and enthusiasm.

South of Raphina too along the coast are many other places on the sea which can be reached by rough tracks and by walking, coves sheltered among pinewoods which one may believe that one has discovered oneself, so remote are they. For the

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areas of villas and of small beaches are widely scattered and between them, if one has the patience to explore, one will find, even so close to Athens, shores and hills with no sign whatever of habitation.

But the road which we are imagining is to the north, and, if we went by it, we should leave Raphina on our right and soon be among the pinewoods that fringe the rocky approaches to the plain of Marathon. Here, too, if one clammers down the low cliffs, there are many good places to bathe ; and on top of the cliffs there is the perfume of dry, prickly and aromatic plants.

The hills press down more closely as one comes to the bay itself. Already one will have seen from a distance its long curve and the green of marshes, of vines and of trees extending below the mountains to the northern promontory. It was towards the southern end of the bay that the battle was fought, and here, among vines, a little way off the road to the right is the high tomb where, after the battle, the Athenian dead were buried.

There are some who are disappointed both by the tomb and by the battlefield. They would expect, perhaps, something more lavishly decorated than this mound of earth to stand as a memorial of the battle which was the chief of all the military glories of the Athenians. Nor is it easy among the vines, the trees and the long marsh grasses to pick out with any exactitude the place where the Persians may have landed, the positions on high ground from which Miltiades led his hoplites into the plain, Greeks seeing most of them, for the first time the novel uniforms and equipment of an eastern army and meeting with their raised shields the first volleys of those flint-pointed arrows which were shot by Ethiopian archers,

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and many of which have been discovered near the surface of the memorial tomb. Here, perhaps for the first time in history, were successfully employed the tactics later to be made famous by the even more total victory of Hannibal at Cannae ; yet it is not easy precisely to place in this green plain the alignments of the opposing armies or to be certain exactly where, in 490 B.C., was the sea coast where the brother of Aeschylus had his arm chopped off by an axe as he attempted to prevent the flight of a Persian ship.

Still, to my mind, the very simplicity of the funeral mound, the very extent and vagueness of the plain add to the impressiveness of the place. It is peculiarly impressive in the evening when the setting sun lights the summits of the Euboean mountains, and the mountains that guard the approaches to Athens darken against the sky. A hushed silence falls over the plain and the blue of the sea. It is not difficult to believe Pausanias who says that every night here, if one listens, there can be heard the whinnying of horses and the clash of arms.

The mountains that enclose the crescent of the plain are themselves a formidable barrier, crossed by only two possible routes in the direction of Athens. To the right, as one looks inland from the funeral mound, is the narrow gorge which leads up to the village of Marathon and to the Marathon dam ; further to the left is the pass through Vrana, by which, presumably, the victorious Athenians returned to Athens, ready to confront their enemy again, if he should sail round Sunium and appear opposite the city herself.

The village of Marathon and the great reservoir of water above the village are, no doubt, sights to be seen ; but, to my mind, a sight far more worth seeing is the little harbour and

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temples of Rhamnus and, indeed, the whole of the northern coast of Attica beyond the bay. If this is the direction that we are taking, we shall not go so far as the town of Marathon, but shall turn off to the right; following the curve of the bay and passing the canals which have been constructed in an effort to drain the great marshes at its northern end. Soon the road will climb into the hills and we shall be leaving the bay and the promontory of Kynosoura behind us. There are avenues of trees and then comes wilder country. Though the roads and tracks here are few enough, it is not unusual to lose one's way. One road, for instance, going to the right, will take one, not to one's destination, but to the singularly beautiful bay of Hagia Marina. Of this road the French guide book says in parentheses "ne pas s'y engager". Having accidentally done so on several occasions, I cannot altogether approve of the injunction, unless one is seriously pressed for time.

The road to Rhamnus itself is, or was till very recently, more of a rough track than a road. It winds through a wide valley, past small oak trees and great quantities of high green aromatic bushes. It is a deserted valley, except for shepherds and goat herds. And it is not only well covered with vegetation, but seems always to contain great numbers of flying things,—enormous grasshoppers, creatures that resemble locusts, butterflies and brightly coloured beetles. Hawks often are seen swinging over the open ground and I have seen here too both hoopoes and bee-eaters.

At the end of this wide valley in the hills one comes suddenly upon the remains of the ancient sanctuary and sea-port of Rhamnus. On the top of a hill the two temples, or what is left of them, stand side by side. The smaller sacred to Themis and the larger to Nemesis. A well-built wall has preserved the

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raised platform or eminence on which they stand from slipping down the steep hillside below. Down this hillside a path runs to the shining levels of the sea which stretch out to the distant coast-line of Euboea ; and on the seashore are the remains of the acropolis and harbours of the ancient town. White shingle lies along the curve of the small bay. Here everything except the sea and the distant heights of the Euboean mountains is on a small scale—the low acropolis, the harbour, the path ascending from the shore to the two temples that stand at the head of this steep valley. And it may be because the eye can so easily take in the whole scene that this is a place which impresses one immediately with a kind of perfection in its proportions and in its situation. Not much remains of the temples except their foundations and the retaining wall ; and on the seashore in the acropolis there are no such impressive fortifications as those of Phyle or of Aegosthena. Yet there will be many who will agree with my opinion that this little bay and valley in the mountains, both in itself, in its surroundings and in the scant traces of its early history, is as beautiful a place as is to be found in Attica or in the world.

Indeed the whole of this coast-line that faces Euboea has a peculiar clarity and beauty. Perhaps it is the apparent nearness of the great island across the blue and shining water that gives its particular distinction to this scenery. Certainly there is a strange contrast between the bright mountainous mass that faces one and the small valleys, the pinewoods, shrubs and grey rock where one walks or stands. But in fact I can find no appropriate words to define the unique quality of these views. In the combination of many opposites,—sea and land, remoteness and propinquity, the stability and the variety of colours—possibly some clue might be found. Yet those who have seen

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these sights will, I expect, be not surprised that words fail me in attempting to describe them.

And, although I have chosen to record the singular beauty of Rhamnus, there are other places along this coast which in different ways are perhaps equally remarkable. In many places the coast is difficult of access and most of the country to the north of Rhamnus is certainly inaccessible from the Marathon road on which we began to imagine this journey. Much of it can be better reached from the road that crosses the eastern shoulders of Parnes to Oropos.

Between Oropos and Kalamos, again close to the coast-line and again a sacred place, is the sheltered valley where once stood the sanctuary of Amphiaraos, the prophet-general of Argos and one of the Seven against Thebes. Against his better knowledge he was forced into the war by his wife's passion for the necklace that was an heirloom in the house of Cadmus. Yet there is nothing in the Amphiaraon that could recall the violence and savagery of Argive or Theban legends. This small and peaceful valley is as tranquil as is Epidaurus itself. Trees and bushes bend over a flowing stream where large speckled frogs are to be found. The waters of this stream were held to possess powers of healing, and on the banks the hero received the honours of an oracle as well as of one with the curative powers of Aesculapius. As one descends the hill to this valley the tremendous view of Euboea and the sea will meet the eye and fascinate it. And in the valley itself, among the trees and near the ruins of the temple, the theatre, and the curious building in which sufferers or inquirers are supposed to have waited for their enlightening dreams, one will be again as though one had turned a corner or opened a door into a wholly different environment, in this case a scene of peace

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and of an almost unearthly seclusion, something far removed from the legendary hatreds which involved the hero's death, far too from the real clash of arms in the bay of Marathon or along the Boeotian frontier or in the great Boeotian plain to the north of the frontier.

Piraeus and the South

SO FAR I have written nothing about the southern Athenian sea coast, although this in fact will be the first part of Attic soil that the traveller will see, whether he comes by ship to Piraeus or by plane to the airport at Khasani. Nor can I now, having written so much, appropriately imagine his first impressions either of the great harbour and busy modern town or of the brown expanse of the airfield between Hymettus and the sea, with Aegina rising from the sea. Instead it will be more convenient to imagine visiting these places from the centre of Athens, once again starting from Syntagma Square.

The road which runs along the upper end of the square past the Royal and Zappion Gardens on the left will soon take us to the Arch of Hadrian and to the colossal remains of the Temple of Olympian Zeus. The Arch is not to my mind of any very great interest, except that it is supposed to mark the position where the ancient city of Theseus once stood. The remains of the temple, however, which one is so apt to overlook or pass by unvisited because of the proximity of the Acropolis or the attractions of some further excursion, are not only impressive but beautiful. The vast plan of the temple was made by the Pisistratids in the late 6th century B.C. Planned by tyrants on a scale of enormous grandeur, the work was only undertaken in the long future years in ages of tyranny and was in the end completed by a Roman emperor. After the fall of the Pisistratids the building, still in its first stages,

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was abandoned for four hundred years. It was begun again in about 176 B.C. by Antiochus Epiphanes, the King of Syria, but was only half finished at the time of this monarch's death. After the Roman conquest and in the imperial age one might have expected so vast a project to have appealed to the imagination of Nero, but he, as we have seen, chose to employ his chief labour force on the Corinth canal. It was the Emperor Hadrian who finally dedicated the building to the god in about A.D. 130, honouring Zeus with a statue of gold and ivory and himself by having his own statue placed close by,—a proceeding that would have been unthinkable in earlier times.

Of the hundred gigantic Corinthian columns that once supported the largest temple in Greece, not many remain standing to-day. Two with a portion of the cornice, during the early ages of Christianity, provided a lofty perch for an ascetic monk. Even allowing for the various depredations made for building material to be used elsewhere, there is no doubt that this grandiose architecture lacked the solidity and the firmness as well as the style of the classical age. It may be that this temple, like so much that is Greco-Roman, is most impressive when ruined. Certainly both the colour and size of the columns that still stand, the great extent of the foundation, the fallen drums of marble, the grassy space where boys may be playing football or old people sitting in the sun,—all this will constitute as fine a sight as anything to be seen in the forum at Rome. Indeed the sight is far finer, for this ruined and enormous temple lies between the grey rock of Hymettus and the slopes of the Acropolis hill. To the south is the sea and the islands. Such a scene, irradiated as it usually is by golden light, cannot easily be forgotten.

Piraeus and the South

Just by the temple the road out of Athens divides. The road to the left would take us inland for some distance before joining the coast further south at Glyphada.

From points along this road, as one looks back to Athens, one will have views of the Parthenon and of the Acropolis which are as impressive as any others, even including the view from the road to Eleusis. Before reaching Glyphada one will pass the main airport at Khasani, and beyond Glyphada, along the coast, are some of the popular bathing beaches. There is the long promontory of Vouliagmeni with its pine-woods and with white sand and shallow water on one side of it. On the other side it is more rocky and the water is deeper. Further still and after turning inland for a little, one will come to the long beach near Varkiza, to my mind the best of all places for bathing in the vicinity of Athens. It is less crowded than Vouliagmeni, and the great bay with the mountains enclosing the bay has an appearance of freshness and of simplicity. And in the light of evening the whole landscape wears an aspect of extraordinary calm and splendour. The eye has far to go before resting on the light streaming over the distant hills or among the shadows that encroach upon the lower ground. Here again, and in an eminent degree, are the spaciousness, the exact proportions, the particular light of Attica.

But I have digressed in mentioning these possible and agreeable excursions for bathing. We set out to go more directly to the sea coast, and, if we were doing so, we should leave the road to Glyphada on our left and take the right hand road which will bring us quickly to the bay of Phaleron. It is a long straight avenue, running between modern buildings, factories and barracks. In the summer one will soon begin to feel the coolness of the sea air as one leaves the stifling city in this

direction, and on summer nights, when one reaches the sea and turns right towards Piraeus, one will see the whole bay, fringed with the glowing ropes of electric bulbs that mark the innumerable tavernas, cafés and hotels which lie along the curve of the coast. Many of these places are worth a visit, partly for the sight of the gay crowds that come here, partly to watch the dancing. Of enjoyment there seems to be no end, and when one compares these crowds with others which one has seen and assumed to be merrymaking in other countries, it will seem almost that outside Greece humanity, even in its leisured and privileged moments, is buried in deep gloom. Here again, perhaps, some fractious critic will take me up and assert that in emphasising the gaiety, the decent uproariousness, the pleasure-loving of the Greeks I am either attempting to advertise a particular class (probably monarcho-fascist) or else 'disguising deliberately the facts of poverty, persecution and 'unrest. I am doing neither the one nor the other, and, if I were to be accused of such a method, would reply that the love of pleasure is a sane thing found generally in Greece among all classes and far more easily to be satisfied than it is with us. These facts are obvious enough, as also is the fact that in Greece there is, in many ways, less social security than exists, for example, in England. Yet there is a type of person who from this fact will draw some unwarrantable conclusions,—either that in Greece only the very rich can enjoy themselves or else that, in any case, all enjoyment is deplorable. Some of these people who so concern themselves with abstract justice abroad might well be advised practically to consider putting their own houses in order. So far as justice goes the Greeks themselves were the first Europeans to discuss the subject; their sense for the meanings and difficulties of the word is still

unimpaired. It may be a tragedy that still, as in the days of Plato, the rival claims of monarchy, oligarchy and democracy are debated and that blood is still shed for each cause ; it may be easy for some outsiders to imagine that Greeks ought more closely to resemble either the Russians or the English. Those who know them better are thankful that the Greeks are still themselves, and still rightly resentful of any efforts, however well-meant, to turn them into something else. That social justice is a matter of great importance no one in his senses would deny. What in the West we tend to forget is that the whole of life is by no means comprised by the strict rules of distributive justice and that the most successful organisation of legal and social services is only a condition for living, not life itself. It is in their hold on real life, both its pleasures and its hardships, that the Greeks are remarkable. They have also their own forms of cruelty, corruption and inefficiency. Examples of these vices are often more glaring than those to be met with every day in the West. So too are examples of initiative, independence and generosity. Moreover the Greeks have avoided entirely that general and wholesale obliquity of outlook and hypocrisy in moral, patriotic or political feeling which is so important an element in the popular entertainment or instruction of the West, and which has contributed so largely to a situation where the majority of Europeans are capable of calmly envisaging their own destruction and that of the world into which they were born.

An imagined criticism has led me to digress unduly from the sight of men, women and children enjoying themselves sociably by the sea. Yet in my own experience such sights have often provoked from sour-faced doctrinaires various expressions of disapproval. Such people and such expressions particularly

when they are met with in Greece, seldom fail to arouse in me the kind of anger that one might feel at a deliberate and unprovoked insult, or at a depth of dangerous and cherished ignorance. Now, after the digression, we must continue to imagine the bay of Phaleron in the direction of Piraeus.

As I have said, the restaurants and tavernas along this coast road are perhaps particularly enjoyable by night. Here, and even more so in Piraeus itself, one may see Greek dancing of the highest quality. Two or three or more men will wait patiently for their turn to take the floor and will then exhibit their skill with the utmost seriousness, vivacity and ease, watched closely by a critical and appreciative audience. There will be sailors and soldiers who may have come from any part of the mainland or the islands ; thus there will be local dances or local variations of those dances which are known everywhere. In some places there will be a continuous roar of the radio, and this, until one has become accustomed to the prodigious din that characterises most night life in Greece, may be found slightly jarring to the nerves. In other places there will be a small orchestra, perhaps with a singer. Sometimes these orchestras will attempt to vie with the radio itself in the volume of sound produced. More often the sound will be subdued, and here in particular one will be able to listen to those dreamy hashish songs for which Piraeus is noted. In some of the smaller and more disreputable places both in Athens and in Piraeus one may be encouraged to drink sweet Samian wine. This, as a rule, is to be avoided. In one famous restaurant in the town of Piraeus it is possible to have what I should imagine is the biggest meal served anywhere in the world. It is impossible here, however, to consult one's own taste, since one is expected to eat exactly what is set in front of

one. The meal takes place in what appears to be a grocer's shop. Silently and deliberately the proprietor will set on the table innumerable dishes containing eggs, crayfish, cheese, olives, prawns, sea anemones, octopus, veal, sausages, vegetables of all kinds, together with many other varieties of meat and fish. These dishes will make their appearances gradually and at decent intervals, and with them will be served a particularly good retsina. After some time the arrival of soup will reveal the fact that, so far from one's having, as one had imagined, finished eating a remarkably satisfying meal, one has only so far been occupied with the hors d'oeuvres. After the soup there may be fish or langoustes, then meat or chicken or turkey. And from time to time still more small dishes of other delicacies will intervene between what, if one could count them, would be the main courses. Finally after a quantity of fruit, there will be pancakes or balls, made I do not know how, and soaked in honey. Such a meal is unique. It is certainly expensive, though it would be fair in estimating its expense to fix upon the price of an ordinary meal and multiply that by ten or more. The bill will not reach this figure, and, unless it does so, one can scarcely complain.

This restaurant and also the various places of amusement along the bay of Fnaleron are places to be visited at night. Both by night and by day the three harbours of Piraeus and the great walls that skirt the main peninsula are impressive or beautiful or both.

The small eastern harbour below Castella has its historic associations and its peculiar charm. On the hill behind stood the ancient fortress of Munychia, another stronghold occupied by Thrasybulus and a more important one than Phyle. Now the steep hillsides are covered with houses, but the small bay

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itself, with the painted boats and the brown nets drying in the sun, seems, even though in some parts the tables and chairs of a restaurant are standing at the very edge of the sea, an ancient or a timeless place. Among the fishing boats may be seen modern yachts and naval vessels, though at no time, probably, has this harbour or the bay to the west of it (the ancient port of Zea) ever seemed so modern, so busy and so technically developed as in the 5th and 4th centuries before Christ, when, behind an elaborate system of fortifications, the great fleets of Athens rode at anchor here, were built, refitted and equipped. This second harbour of Zea is rather larger than the first and more regularly circular in its land-locked form. The straight streets of the modern town come down to the quays and the whole atmosphere is busier and more vivacious than is that of the eastern harbour. In ancient times this was the most important of the three naval arsenals. It is separated from the great modern port of Piraeus by a promontory of rocky land, a peninsula where, facing the open sea, still stand the remains of the walls of Conon. This promontory and these two eastern harbours have certainly stirred my mind more than does the main harbour with its docks and warehouses and cranes and constant sea-going traffic. It is a confession which, no doubt, betrays the prejudices of a landsman ; for Piraeus is still the gateway to the outer world and to the islands. Still I have found that in returning to it, one is more interested in the sight of Lycabettus and the Athenian mountains than in the harbour ; and in leaving it one's mind is seldom detained by this port from the views of Aegina and of Salamis. And indeed here and now I am tempted away from my subject to imagine some excursion to the nearer islands,—to Aegina with its long water-front and its grey temple on the mountain,

to Poros with its lemon groves and with the mound of twinkling lights reflected in the dark water of the harbour. Here once at the end of summer I came to visit the poet Seferis, who had just completed his latest poem "The Thrush". It is a poem full of the atmosphere of the islands and of those cities on distant coastlines which have always been a part of Greece, and the poem finds a concentration in a submerged wreck in Poros harbour. The meanings and the implications extend from this submarine locality. There are adjectives taken from Homer ; there is the light and the texture of paint work on sea-faring boats ; there are the leaning statues and the voice of the radio that interrupts itself in the declaration of war and of certain loss ; Socrates and Oedipus are in the poem together with the water wagtail, the cicada, the light upon the shutters, and dresses unpacked from old trunks. It is a poem written with incomparable skill, yet more to be admired than the poet's skilfulness is his deep and extensive awareness of the world of the Greeks, a world sharp in every detail yet with every detail significant.

From Poros, on this occasion, we went on to the indomitable island of Hydra, again into an atmosphere that was totally different from that of Poros and yet was entirely Greek. Here too, one enters the harbour and sees the steep cliffs with their white houses, some small, some the great dwelling places of famous admirals, one will be overcome once more with that feeling of sudden delighted surprise which, in some strange way, is akin to a feeling of recognition.

But in this short description of various scenes I have deliberately confined myself to the mainland vicinity of Athens, and therefore must not attempt to go outside it. Even this small portion of the mainland has been described

haphazardly and incompletely. Were I to attempt any description of the islands I should be involved at once, not only in innumerable words, but in a survey of so much that is individual and eccentric (though it would have too its underlying unity) that I should despair of being able to shape from such abundance of material any figures of real significance.

Indeed, as it is, I am conscious of how weak and insignificant are the structures that I have made already from a severely limited memory and imagination. Those who have seen and felt the little that I have attempted to describe will, perhaps, sometimes, through a kind of fellow feeling, overlook the disparity between my words and their intention. Others who have not been able personally to experience the prodigious and delightful fascination of Greece may well complain that I have confined myself to the most well-worn topics, that I have brought nothing new to light, that I have not even expressed myself intelligibly upon the subject of politics. From such critics I can only ask the indulgence that might be given to one who, knowing that his words cannot rise to the level of his feelings, still attempts to convey to others an emotion that he finds to be dominating him.

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